bassplayer

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SPECTOR PULSE 2
DOES THIS NS STAND UP?

“WHAT DO I HAVE LEFT TO ACHIEVE? I WANT TO BE A *GOOD MUSICIAN*...”

PLUS!

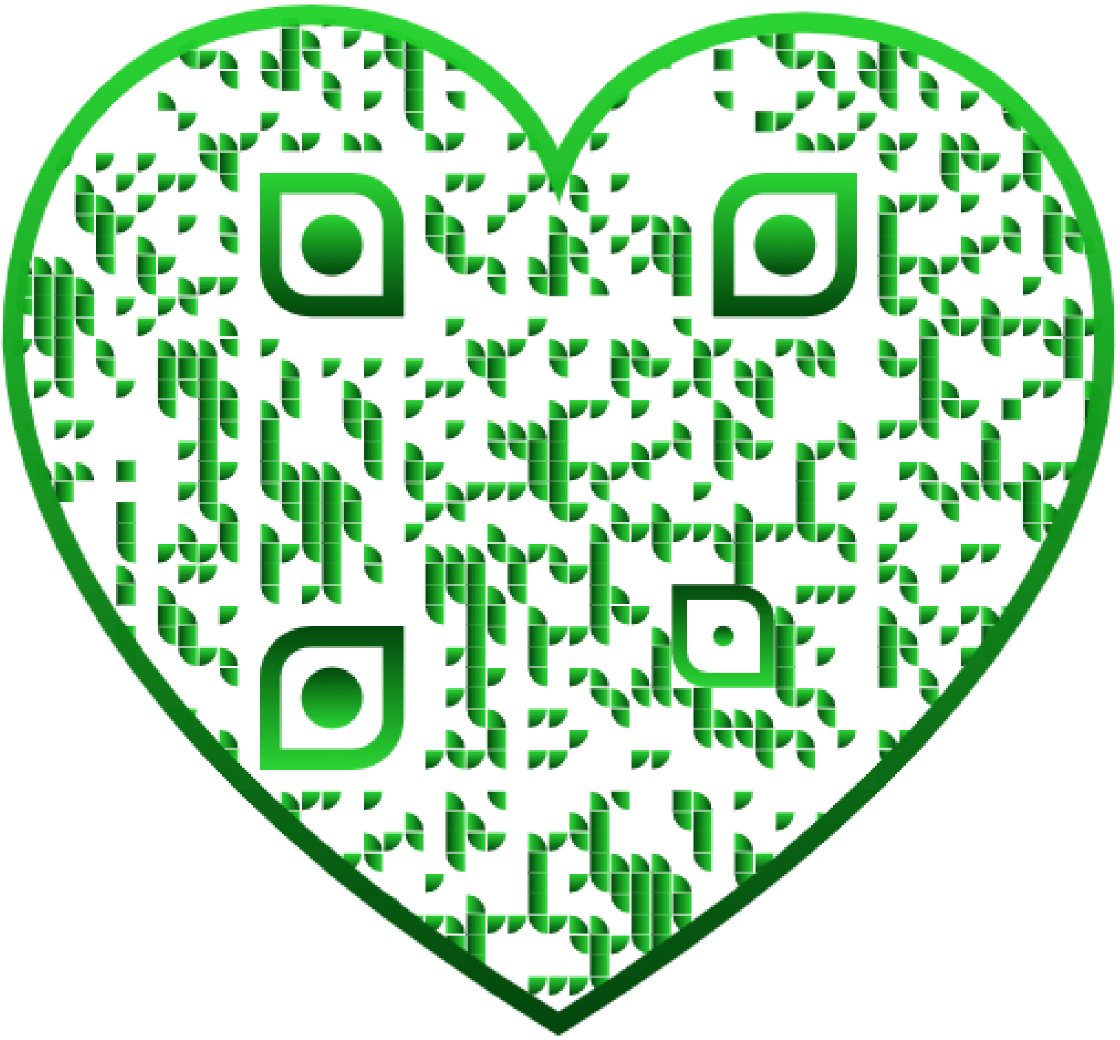
WILL LEE
BONNIE BUITRAGO
TROY SANDERS
JERRY JEMMOTT
IAN HILL

FLEA

What it’s like to be the world’s best bass player* and *still* feel like you’re not good enough

*As voted for by you

FUTURE



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WELCOME

The power of love will save us, says Flea. He makes a valid point, right?

When the Red Hot Chili Peppers, heroes in our world for decades, announced recently that their new studio album would be called *Unlimited Love*, it gave me pause for thought. We are, after all, coming out (we hope) of the worst episode in public health in a very long time: is 2022 really the year that we should be suggesting that love is the solution to all our problems?

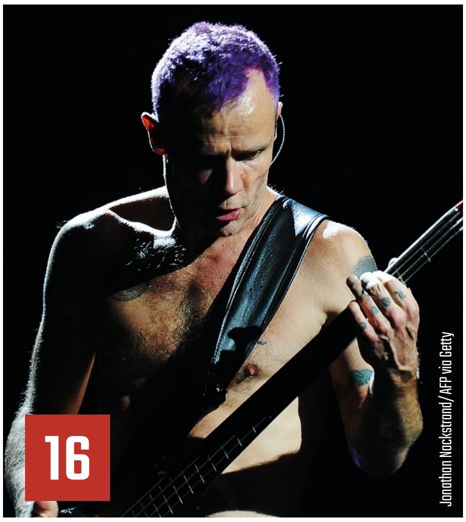
Having spent a long time in conversation with RHCP bassist Flea for this issue of *BP*, though, I now understand the message more clearly. Love for our chosen instrument, love for his band-mates, love for music: if these are at the core of our worldview, as they are for him, then we will be more tolerant, kinder people who are better equipped to help each other out of the current situation. That's my take on it, anyway: I'll be interested to hear yours.

I've always thought that we bass players are a pretty good bunch of people anyway. Of course, we have our flaws like everybody else, but there's something about being the primal heartbeat of any musical endeavour that makes us rise above most of the petty problems of everyday existence. I like to think you'll get some of this from our other interviews in this issue with a host of talented bassists from the blues, session, indie and metal worlds, as well as from our panel of educators. They genuinely want one thing: to fulfil our stated aim of making you the best bass player you can be.

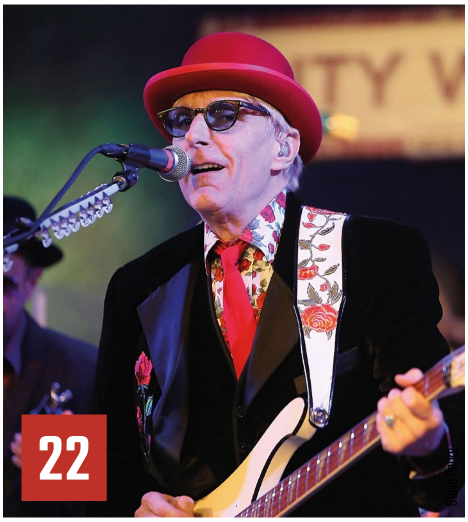
Maybe this 'sharing the love' idea makes sense after all. If it works for a bassist as advanced as Flea, it'll work for the rest of us.

See you next month, friends.

Joel McIver, Editor



Jonathon Nackstrand/AFP via Getty



Al Pereira/Getty

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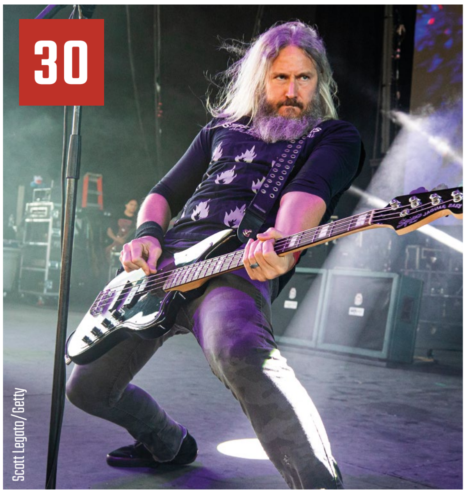

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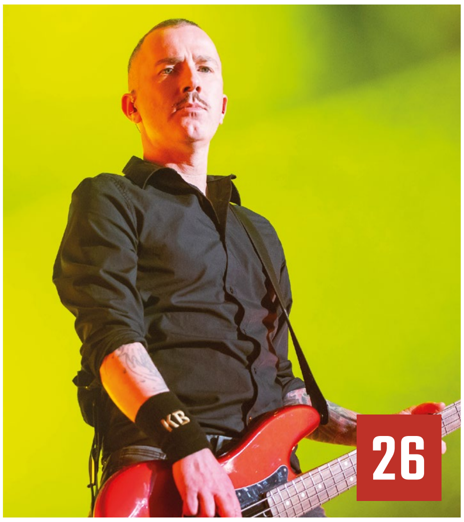

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Raphael Meert

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Mikka Skaffari/FilmMagic/Getty

bassplayer

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THE Lowdown

News and views from the bass world, collated by BP's team of newshounds

SPACE BASS

Thundercat heads to a galaxy far, far away...

Bass wizard Stephen 'Thundercat' Bruner has made his acting debut in the Star Wars spinoff series, *The Book Of Boba Fett*. He appeared in *The Gathering Storm*, the fourth episode of the series which premiered on Disney+ on December 29, portraying a body modification artist with a robot hand. It's unclear as yet whether Thundercat will appear in any future episodes of the show.

As we're told, *The Book Of Boba Fett* finds Fett and mercenary Fennec Shand "navigating the Galaxy's underworld when they return to the sands of Tatooine to stake their claim on the territory once ruled by Jabba the Hutt and his crime syndicate." A perfect setting for Thundercat, who addressed cosmic matters in last year's *BP* cover feature.

"Bass carries a lot of weight, literally and figuratively," he said. "We look up and we see guys like Sting, Jaco Pastorius, Stanley Clarke, Charles Mingus, and I feel like it transverses worlds because of the roles that it plays... the bass frequencies are somewhere between the bass and the drums. It's a feeling that it creates that is universal."

At the end of 2021 Thundercat celebrated the tenth anniversary of his debut album, *The Golden Age Of Apocalypse*, with a gold holographic vinyl edition for Record Store Day. His song 'Them Changes' is also having a 'viral moment' on Tik Tok.

Pandemic permitting, Thundercat will be headlining a set of dates in Europe this year, followed by additional European and US dates supporting the Red Hot Chili Peppers. May the force be with him.

Try double-thumbing with that picking hand.

© Carlos G. @ TheJointB

The Empurror Palpatine has a new adversary.

Nano Notes

Phil Jones Bass announces the Nanobass combo.

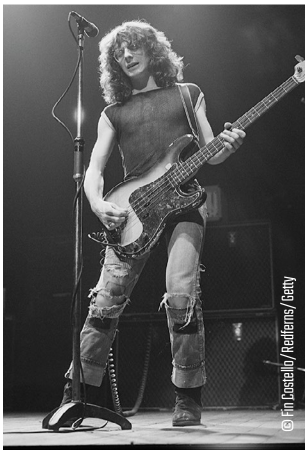
The new X4 Nanobass, according to its makers Phil Jones Bass, is the most compact and portable combo amplifier ever designed. As they tell us, "It is a highly efficient mini-engineering marvel – a 35-watt amplifier with a 4" speaker and three-band EQ that not only rocks with bass, but will also provide dazzling tone for other instruments including guitar, ukulele, violin and electronic drums."

The new unit has a street price of $359.99, and will be reviewed in these pages as soon as we get hold of one.

Bass Breeze

A new, four-bassist project.

Martin Wind's new album, *Air*, available via Laika Records, features four bassists – Wind, Gregg August, Jordan Frazier and Sam Suggs – playing music by Bach, the Beatles, Joe Zawinul, Charlie Haden and more. "I consider them the A-Team for this kind of project," says Wind. "Thanks to their versatility and perfect bowing technique, I was able to explore the immense tonal possibilities of the instrument, as well as the entire scope between classical, rock and jazz."



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Burke Shelley RIP

The frontman and bassist for the cult Welsh rock band Budgie, Burke Shelley, died aged 71 on January 10. Born in Cardiff, Wales in 1950, he was introduced to the world of guitar with the arrival of the Beatles in the Sixties – a musical exposure that convinced Shelley to ask his father for his first instrument.

In 1967, Shelley – who by this time had already authored a number of songs, including Budgie's 'Parents', which he wrote when he was 16 – met Dave Edmunds, who was part of musical trio Love Sculpture. It was during this transformative year that Shelley decided to pursue a full-time music career.

Switching to bass, Shelley recruited drummer Ray Phillips and guitarists Kevin Newton and Brian Goddard for Budgie's first official lineup, though the swift departure of Newton and Goddard soon saw the installation of Tony Bourge, who became Shelley's stalwart co-writer until 1978.

The trio penned a deal with MCA Records in the Seventies, and would go on to release three albums with Budgie's definitive lineup. Their 1971 self-titled debut, 1972's *Squawk*, and 1973's *Never Turn Your Back On A Friend* are considered by many to be their finest records.

SQUIER TURNS FORTY

Fender celebrates 40 years of Squier with new P- and J-Basses

Although Fender have launched several variants on the venerable Precision and Jazz format in recent years, we're particularly keen on two new Squier basses, the 40th Anniversary models. These are available for $599.99 each and come in Gold and Vintage editions. The last time we reviewed a Squier bass we were genuinely hard put to differentiate it – tonally, at least – from its full-priced Fender equivalent, making the affordable brand a viable option for more or less any bassist.

The Squier 40th Anniversary Precision Bass features a C-shaped neck profile, vintage-style tuning machines, a four-saddle bridge with barrel saddles, and a Fender-designed split single-coil pickup with alnico magnets. Body material differs between each model: the Gold Edition sports a nyatoh body, while the Vintage Edition is available in either nyatoh or poplar. Colour options include Black and Lake Placid Blue on the Gold Edition, and Satin Vintage Blonde and Satin Dakota Red on the Vintage version.

The equivalent Jazz has the same appointments plus the expected pair of single-coils, again with alnico magnets. Aesthetic options for this model include Olympic White and Ruby Red Metallic finishes on the Gold Edition model, and Satin Seafoam Green and Satin Wide Sunburst colourways on the Vintage bass.

The days when an affordable instrument came with shoddy parts seem to be behind us

The era of cheap but decent basses is definitely upon us, then, and has been for some time. We love our top-line instruments here at *BP*, make no mistake, but the days when an affordable instrument came with shoddy parts seem to be behind us. Will these basses be as functional in 20 years as their more expensive parent models? See you in 2042 with the verdict.

IN THE Groove

ERYKAH BADU
LIVE
(UNIVERSAL, 1997)

The Queen of Neo-Soul in her element

Tim Mosenfelder/ImageDirect/Getty

Every month, we reassess an album with influential, interesting or otherwise cool bass parts. This month, it's neo-soul singer Erykah Badu's 1997 LP, *Live*.

Erykah Badu's second album was a live one, unusually, issued in 1997 a few months after her hugely successful studio debut, *Baduizm*. The Texas-based singer and her band recorded a one-hour live show, plus a studio track, on October 1 at Sony Studios in New York in front of a live and justifiably excited crowd. The record contains three covers – Chaka Khan's 'Stay', Roy Ayers' 'Searching' and an intricate medley of Heatwave's 'Boogie Nights', Tom Browne's 'Funkin' For Jamaica' and the Mary Jane Girls' 'All Night Long'. There are also two brand-new songs, 'Ye Yo' and 'Tyrone', the latter of which was released as a single shortly before the album's release.

What's great about the established songs taken from *Baduizm* is that Badu and her band have taken the trouble to re-create them in new forms, improvising wildly at points, with the singer interjecting skits and spontaneous reworkings of the familiar arrangements. *Live* begins with 'Rimshot', with the beginning reworked to include the instantly recognisable opening bars of Miles Davis' 'So What', a bass figure played by Hubert Eaves IV.

Eaves, who has also toured with Freddie Jackson, the O'Jays, Seal, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, Lisa Lisa and many other artists, delivers a flawless performance here and throughout the set. Badu's best-known song was and remains her first single, 'On & On', in which Eaves delivers a sparse but weighty line on a faster, funkier version of the song than the original from *Baduizm*. It's evidently an audience favourite, with the bass driving it forward, accompanied by expert drums and keys from Charles Bell and Norman Hurt.

> **Badu and her band re-create established songs in new forms, improvising wildly**

While Eaves' bass-playing is undeniably gripping, the *Live* album itself might be regarded as a touch smooth, not to say self-indulgent, for today's tastes. Still, Badu continues to lead a successful career, as does Eaves, and there's no denying the conviction of the music or its interpretation.

The Albums That Made Me

© Mairo Cinquetti/NurPhoto via Getty

THIS MONTH

Alex Webster

Cannibal Corpse's bassist looks back at five albums that mark key points in his career as a master of the low end.

Death metal devils Cannibal Corpse were formed in Buffalo, New York in 1988, and over three decades have produced 15 brutally aggressive but melodic albums. Bassist and founder member Alex Webster has been there for the entire journey, from the early, live-sounding albums through the group's development into the technically spectacular, experienced outfit that we hear today. Webster's galloping three-finger technique unlocks speed and accuracy that other bassists can only dream of; remarkably, he achieves great attack and clarity without the need for a pick.

These days, he wields his signature Spector bass, having also played Fender, Modulus and Ibanez basses over the years. As well as being an intensely talented player, Webster was also given the ultimate accolade a while back when paleontologists named a fossil ringworm after him – a toothy monster called Websteroprion Armstrongi.

This month, Webster talks us through five key moments from his ongoing career. Unlike the aforementioned worm, he is no fossil – and shows no signs of slowing down as a player, songwriter and metal force. If anything, he's eager to achieve an even faster pace…

CANNIBAL CORPSE

Violence Unimagined (2021)

"This wasn't the usual CC way to record."

"We recorded this in April and May 2020, and of course we all know what was going on in the world at that time. I live in Oregon, on the West Coast of the United States, and the rest of the guys are down in Florida. Normally that's not a problem, but with the pandemic, travel restrictions and not knowing what was safe it became difficult. I did go down and jam with the guys that March on the new material, but by April it was clear that I couldn't go there again. Cannibal has always been a band that records together in the same studio, so this was not the normal way to do it for us. Fortunately, I have a good home studio setup here, which these days means a great audio interface, a program like Pro Tools and some really good DI bass boxes. I think for bass guitar you can get great results wherever you record, as long as you get a good DI signal. I had a clean DI channel, plus a distorted Darkglass B7K. Erik Rutan [Cannibal Corpse guitarist] produced, and he reamped the bass through a 1971 Ampeg, and then a Darkglass Microtubes X7 pedal. I also like to use a program like Sibelius to tab out all of my bass parts."

CANNIBAL CORPSE
Eaten Back To Life (1990)

"The mistakes give it that live feel."

"I had done a couple of demos before this, but this was our first full-length album. All of us were pretty inexperienced when we recorded it. I wasn't even aware that you could punch in to fix any mistakes, so pretty much everything you hear is what me and Paul Mazurkiewicz, the drummer, put to tape. We'd been performing all the songs on *Eaten* live around the northeast of the US, which has not always been the case with subsequent albums, where we practise the songs but haven't played them live before going into the studio. We were all in one big room, with my cab in an isolated chamber, but we all had headphones and little mixers for ourselves. These days we'd probably do drums first, then rhythm guitar, then bass, vocals, solos and so on. Back then, we had a week and a half to finish the album, so me and Paul had to nail it all in two days. If you screwed something up, you just did the whole thing again. I guess there's little things I'd consider mistakes on there, but that captures something: it gives them that live feel. I was playing my 1980s Japanese Fender Precision through a Gallien-Krueger head and an Ampeg SVT cab."

CANNIBAL CORPSE
The Bleeding (1994)

"A big step forward for me as a bass player."

"Our fourth album is where we really came into our own and hit our stride. We were just as aggressive as the previous three albums, but we added more polish and professionalism. The word 'polish' is a terrible one in metal, but it really just means being a high-level, professional-sounding death metal band. I put a lot of stuff in there, too: it was the most bass guitar-intense album so far, and I'm pretty loud in the mix. All the songs have cool little bass things that jump out and go a little bit beyond what the guitar is doing in a particular section – for example, there's a bunch of cool almost-solos on the bass in 'An Experiment In Homicide'. There's a fairly simple but prominent bass feature in the middle of 'Staring Through The Eyes Of The Dead' which is different from the guitars and stands out nicely. Experience means a lot as a musician, and you learn over time. I feel that *The Bleeding* was a big step forward for me as a bass player, and as a band it put us on the same level as some of the other groups we thought were a little more professional-sounding than we were. We looked up to bands like Morbid Angel and Death."

CANNIBAL CORPSE
The Wretched Spawn (2004)

"Some of our most challenging material."

"We recorded this at Sonic Ranch, 40 minutes outside of El Paso, Texas. I was playing a Spector bass that I'd bought – previously I hired one for *Vile* [1996] and I had also been playing Modulus basses. This is an album with some of our most challenging material, and a lot of bass stuff going on. There's some extremely complex playing on 'Frantic Disembowelment', which is technically very difficult to execute. There's a lot of fast fingerwork and complex song structures, for example on 'Bent Backwards And Broken'. I was really happy with my tone here, and though I play through Aguilar amps these days, I've used Ampeg more often in my career than anything else. On this album it was probably a SVT-4 Pro into a 8x10 cabinet: we were looking for something punchy, where you can hear the finger attack. I like it to be a tone that doesn't jump out as being overdriven, but is loud, aggressive and clean. Fast picking, low tunings, and double-kick drums all make the bass player's job a touch more difficult, so having a good tone that cuts through is very important – something just on the verge of going over the edge."

CONQUERING DYSTOPIA
Conquering Dystopia (2014)

"Sometimes simplicity is the best thing."

"This was one of the albums where I built up some home recording experience – and which obviously paid off recently. The band is guitarists Keith Merrow and Jeff Loomis, plus Alex Rüdinger on drums and me on bass. Keith and Jeff are virtuoso guitar players and Alex is an amazing drummer, so there's a whole lot of notes going on. The album was all written before I did the bass parts, so I looked at the guitar and drums and blended into them a bit. There might be bits where replicating the guitar parts would be difficult or impossible, or it just wouldn't sound good, so I'd take some notes from the guitars and land on the kick or snare strikes. It can be overwhelming when you're working with music that's so fast and so dense. I wanted to support it and tie things together while the guitarists went off to different planets. I play fingerstyle, so with Keith and Jeff's super-fast picking, I couldn't get to their speed: even if I could play that fast, the notes wouldn't be blooming. The bass is low, the strings are thick – and when the music is challenging, sometimes simplicity is the best thing."

THE Lowdown

I WAS THERE!

A historic moment in bass world – recalled by those who were there to see it

50 years ago, the great Jerry Jemmott endured career-threatening injuries in two incidents

Gerald 'Jerry' Jemmott, born in the South Bronx in New York in 1946, was a rising star by the time he was 25. Influenced by Miles Davis's bassist Paul Chambers as a kid and a working bass player by the age of 16, he spent his early career recording for Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett and Jerry Jeff Walker, among other artists.

An early Jemmott fan was Jaco Pastorius, who said: "When I was 15 or 16 years old, I used to sneak off from school and go down to Criteria [Studios in Miami]. I'd hide in the bathroom bent all over, just so I could listen to Jerry Jemmott. It was incredible; those were the sounds I wanted to make. He was my idol."

In 1969, the blues giant BB King released two albums featuring Jemmott, *Alive And Well* and *Completely Well*. Jemmott told Gene Santoro of *Guitar Player* in May 1984 about the night that King was awarded a Grammy, saying: "I went back to his dressing room to say hi, and – well, he fell down on his knees and started bowing down to me. I was so embarrassed. But BB's like that – just a real warm-hearted nice guy.'

Perhaps Jemmott's most enduring recording came in late 1972 with Roberta Flack and 'Killing Me Softly With His Song'. The young bassist's legacy looked assured from that point, as indeed it has proved to be, although a hiatus was around the corner. A car accident in December '72 temporarily put paid to his career, leaving him with a broken left shoulder and nose and several damaged muscles, requiring a two-week stay in hospital. He checked out of hospital two days before Christmas, although he wore a neck brace and his arm was in a sling.

As if that wasn't bad enough, while he was shopping for presents in Yonkers, police officers mistook him for a suspect for whom they were searching, and had him arrested and held overnight. Unbelievably, one of the officers broke Jemmott's right wrist with a karate chop.

"My muscles, co-ordination – everything was all messed up," he told Santoro. "I couldn't play at all for a long time, and even after a couple of years I still couldn't do all the things I used to do. Sometimes I'd just get so embarrassed and frustrated."

It took a decade for the City of Yonkers to settle the suit for false arrest brought by Jemmott, finding in his favour. "These things happen all the time, but you never believe it until it happens to you," he added. "It's made me a champion of peace and justice. I became a Buddhist in 1974, and that kept me cool going through 10 years' worth of legal hassles. It gave me a focus when I couldn't play. But now it's finally over and behind me, and I can get on with my life."

> “These things happen all the time, but you never believe it until it happens to you”
> *Jerry Jemmott*

Jemmott in Atlantic Studios in New York in January 1969: Aretha Franklin is seated at the piano.

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Low Life

GETTING STARTED

Head back to the stage in style

Maximise your live bass playing with Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM Senior Lecturer Antonio Angotti.

BIMM INSTITUTE

Welcome back! This month I want to provide advice for those of you looking to gig for the first time with a new band. This also applies to those who've had some time away from the live circuit and want to know how best to tackle the gig scene.

FUNDAMENTALS

As with anything in today's saturated, content-driven world, you need to give your band the best possible start. You only get one chance at a first impression, so it's key that you establish an air of professionalism and credibility. This includes everything from a strong set of cohesive material, a unified image, an engaging live show, considered and well-branded online materials, adequate online presence and interaction, and songs that are ready for release. Remember, touring is your chief income stream: recordings have become secondary earners thanks to today's music-streaming culture, acting more as a justification for touring.

EPK

You will need an easily-accessible way to showcase your band to those from whom you want help. An Electronic Press Kit (EPK) should include a strong photo of your band, a short biography focused on your USP and what sets you apart, YouTube links to a live performance video and a music video, links to your best three tracks on YouTube – but as unlisted videos – press quotes if available, links to social media and most importantly, your contact details! Make all of these items focused and to the point.

GATEKEEPERS

If you're looking for initial gig bookings, the first person to try will be a local promoter. Research local venues and find billings that match your band's genre: the posters or promo materials will often display the promoter's details. I would suggest attending one of their shows, where you can introduce yourself in person and tell them what you're after. A 'cold email' will be less likely to elicit a response. Local promoters will be able to put you on relevant local shows, and some may even be in a position to offer you support slots for touring acts passing through.

GIG SWAPS

Alternatively, you may wish to reach out to other bands in your local area to try and organise support slots. Sharing and tagging other local bands with your own fanbase may help to build that community between you. You could even look further afield and offer a gig to an out-of-town band in exchange for a support slot on one of their hometown shows.

VENUE HIRE

Lastly, some venues may hire out the space directly to you to organise your own show. Bear in mind, though, that you will be taking on the role of promoter, marketing, finance and more, as well as playing. If you organise it well, though, this could result in a profitable outcome.

The Woodshed

YOUR ACOUSTIC BASS, PART 3

Rob Elrick tells the neck-id truth

Ace luthier Rob Elrick brings decades of wisdom to the table. Listen up as he delivers the verdict!

This month, we conclude our deconstruction and exploration of the three primary components of the electric bass guitar. Having previously discussed the body and fretboard, let's now consider the neck – the most interesting, and certainly most critical, component of every bass.

Necks can be constructed in a number of different ways, using a variety of materials, all of which contribute their own unique characteristics. The type of wood chosen for a neck influences the tonal character of an instrument. Harder woods are generally brighter, contributing better clarity and articulation than softer woods. The complementary pairing of different neck and fretboard woods combine to create a wide variety of potential voices.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of any neck is its ability to affect overall performance by influencing the transmission quality of vibration through the instrument. The thru-neck construction used on many single- and double-cutaway basses offers the most efficient transmission of vibration through an instrument. This type of construction allows a bass to vibrate as a nearly singular entity, resulting in fast transients and long sustain.

Basses featuring set-neck and hybrid construction, with necks that are permanently glued in place, retain some of the singular qualities of thru-neck basses, but their general performance tends to straddle the line between thru-neck and bolt-on basses. The mechanical joint used on bolt-on neck basses is a major influence on the performance qualities of many famous instruments. The inherent inefficiency of that mechanical joint results in note decay and sustain that is simply not present in instruments utilising other types of construction. This inefficiency is responsible for familiar characteristics that define the sound of a vintage bass versus that of a modern one.

Ultimately, every bass guitar is a sum of its primary parts whose acoustic performance depend on the sympathetic relationships between its body, neck, and fretboard. Take time when demoing new basses to investigate their specs, cataloguing which elements, and combinations of those elements, appeal to your individual style and taste.

Theory of the Month

SWITCH RHYTHM GEARS

Joe Hubbard takes us through ways to exploit a useful item of theory

The concept of switching rhythm gears is based on the idea of developing the ability to change seamlessly from one rhythmic feel to another. Initially we want to learn to hear this concept, so I'm using shorter bar lengths to demonstrate this. Ultimately, you could apply this over larger bar lengths.

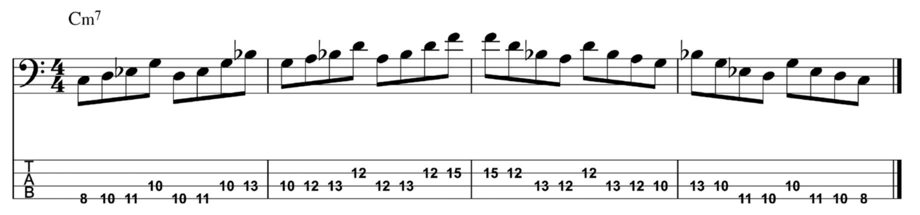
The three main feels in Western music are eighth notes, triplets and 16th notes. As you know, eighth notes consist of two notes divided equally over one beat, while triplets divide three notes over one beat, and 16th notes divide four notes over one beat. I'm going to use a Dorian mode pattern over a Cmin7 chord to demonstrate this concept, and we'll start off by playing eighth notes over a four-bar pattern. When we increase

> **One of the most valuable takeaways from this exercise is understanding how you can increase your speed by altering the rhythmic values that you play**

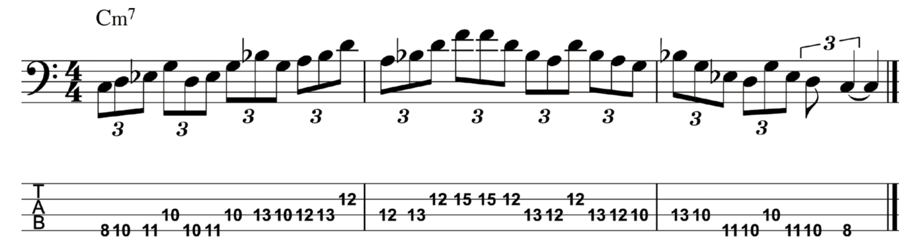
the rhythmic value to triplets, this shortens the bar length to three. Increasing the rhythmic value to 16th notes brings the number of bars down to two.

One of the most valuable takeaways from this exercise is understanding how you can increase your speed by altering the rhythmic values that you play. Many of us already understand this, but we will try to go from eighth notes to 16th notes – only to find out that this exceeds our playing ability. If this happens, you can easily increase speed by switching gears to triplets instead. Until next time, practise smart, work hard and play creatively!

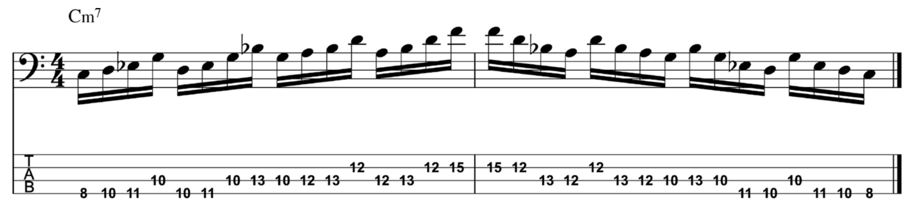
EXERCISE ONE: BEGINNER



EXERCISE TWO: INTERMEDIATE



EXERCISE THREE: ADVANCED



EXERCISE 1

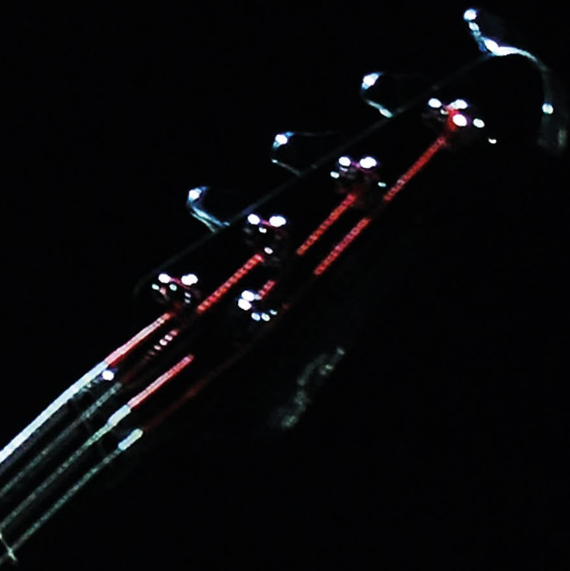
This exercise is based on a Dorian mode with a mixture of scale and chord tones. An easy way to look at this is by recognising the diatonic triads in the scale. Notice that in bar 1, the first four notes are a C minor triad with a scale note between the first and the third notes. The second four notes make up an E♭ major triad, with a scale note leading into the E♭. In the second bar, the first four notes are a G minor triad with a scale note between the first and third notes, while the next four notes make up a B♭ major triad with a scale note leading into the B♭. The next two bars use the same line, but descending.

EXERCISE 2

In this line, we're playing the exact same notes, but converting the rhythm to triplets. Notice that by 'switching gears', we increase the number of notes per bar and transform the original four-bar phrase into a three-bar phrase. Also, check out how this affects the melodic contour of the line when played.

EXERCISE 3

By switching gears up to 16th notes, we've now converted our original line into a 'double time' line, where we are playing twice as fast as the original line in Exercise 1. In order to effectively practise all three exercises in succession, first find your capable tempo with 16th notes and then reverse-engineer to find a starting tempo for the eighth notes.



Love Is In The Air

The Red Hot Chili Peppers' new album is a showcase for Flea, who you recently voted the world's best rock bassist – but as he tells Joel McIver, he doesn't see himself that way.

"We work hard," wrote Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Michael 'Flea' Balzary in the liner notes of 2004's *Greatest Hits* album, a world away from the club-level act that his band had been two decades before. That hard work has led him to the position of Best Bassist in multiple polls in this magazine – even though, as he tells us, he's nowhere near being the bassist that he really wants to be. It's our job to find out why.

An Australian who moved to California as a kid and endured a tough childhood which you can read all about in his 2019 autobiography *Acid For The Children*, Flea – so nicknamed for his habit of leaping about on stage, like you didn't know that already – is probably his demographic's most visible bass player. He won his category in BP's 100 Greatest Bassists Poll a couple of issues ago by a significant margin, indicating that many of you reading this would agree with that assessment.

A jazz- and punk-rock obsessive since his early days, Flea's bass parts are deft without being over-polished, fast without lacking heart, and infused with a hippie West Coast sensibility that is equal parts Larry Graham and Peter Hook. Nowhere is this more evident than on the Chili Peppers' new album, *Unlimited Love*, whose title may sound like a rom-com but whose contents definitely deserve your attention.

Produced by Rick Rubin and featuring the returning John Frusciante's first work with the band since 2009 – when he was replaced by Josh Klinghoffer, who he replaced in turn two years ago – *Unlimited Love* is a subtler RHCP record than many fans will expect. Generally quieter and less aggressive than their best-known albums *Mother's Milk* (1989), *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (1991) and *Californication* (1999), the album leaves plenty of space for Flea to fill with a variety of bass parts – and fill them he does. We sat down with the perennial punk of funk to see where his head is at in 2022...

Did you record *Unlimited Love* the old-school way – together in the studio?

Yeah, absolutely. We don't know any other way. We like to record live to tape, with all of us playing together in a room, looking at each other playing, feeling each other playing, like we've always done it. We sit in a rehearsal room for months on end, writing, jamming, laughing, arguing, and at a certain point, the shit has been honed and nurtured, so we go in and put it on tape and play it for Rick. He makes his comments and then we record it.

© Jonathon Nockstrand/AFP via Getty

I assume that when you play with John Frusciante, it's like putting on a pair of comfortable old sneakers, or am I way off?
No, no, that's it. That's a really correct assumption. You know, John was gone for 10 years, and the first second that we started jamming together again, it was just like talking. We were both yearning for the same thing to happen, and when the thing happens, we're both completely conscious that it's happening. It's like that with the four of us, not just me and John. It was like that with Josh too, who is a beautiful musician, and not only a beautiful musician but a great person – someone who is kind and thoughtful and generous and supportive, musically and otherwise. It's just different sets of reference points, and different ways of looking at what the project is. It's just a matter of the language spoken organically, you know – and we have that with John in spades. It's there, and it's clear, and it's simple, and it's easy.

And what about working with Rick Rubin? I never know whether he kicks your asses in the studio, or if he just sits back and is a kind of impassive guru figure.
You know, to be honest, I didn't see a lot of him. I think he came to one rehearsal, and he listened to the shit and he loved it. He gives us arrangement advice, and he tells us how he thinks the essence of the song can be brought out better. You know, how we can serve the melody and the vocal, or whether a song needs to change key or tempo, or if he thinks one part should be longer and another part should be approached in a different way. We went through that with him and then we laid it all down. He and Anthony went to Hawaii and did the vocals, and John and I stayed and did whatever overdubs were needed to my parts and John's guitar parts. He added a whole plethora of keyboards and backing vocals, too.

There's tons of room for you to move around on this album – it's a real bass playground in that sense.
I think that's just where we're at, collectively, and where I'm at. I think about playing bass – particularly as it relates to the Red Hot Chili Peppers – as like a river. With the bass-lines and the way I want to play them, I want to live my life in a way that allows me to open myself up enough for this cosmic, spiritual river to flow through me. I can unleash it however it needs to go – like when it needs to be violent rapids, or when it needs to be a calm, still pool. However I can serve the chords, the melody, the rhythm and the harmony, I'm going to be loose and free and let it flow. I feel like we have a lot of great rhythms and chords and melodies and I just want to flow through it, man. It can be a supportive thing, or it can be a hypnotic, repetitive thing which creates that meditative feeling of hypnosis that we all want in music, you know what I mean? Whether I'm talking about fucking Discharge or Slayer or Erik Satie or everything in between, it's that human feeling that we want, the connectedness of humanity, that we feel when we hear great music.

© Ben Stansall/AFP via Getty

Launching the Fleabass in 2009.

How do you apply this in practice?
I get out of the way and let the thing flow. More often than not on this record, I'm all over the place. I'm just letting it flow. Every song is different than the next, every call is different than the next. I'm just feeling the music and feeling what works, and as long as I stay focused and diligent as a musician, and I play a lot, and I pay attention and I'm humble, I'm continuing to learn. When the opportunity comes to play, after a lifetime of playing, I have all these reference points and all these feelings, which are part of who I am, that make me up. They're constantly guiding me and I trust them. I trust all the things that have come through me.

How much of the bass is arranged and how much is improvised in the moment?
I like to not know what I'm going to play. I know the feeling of what I'm going to play, and I know the feeling that I'm yearning for, but I'm gonna trust my fingers and my nervous system and my brain and my relationship with God to come through. I just want to rock it. I just want to let it happen.

Do you practise much?
I practise, I do my scales. I do my stuff. I study. I love music. I love the bass. I get more joy picking up my bass and holding it in my hands than I ever have in my life, you know. I love to play the thing. I've got my '61 Fender Jazz and I love the lightness of it, the smoothness of the neck. I hold it in my hands and all is right in the world.

I love the unselfishness of John's guitar parts. He obviously doesn't feel the need to show off at this point.
John is so fucking good, man. He is more technically capable than he's ever been. He can play anything. His knowledge of music is encyclopaedic. His taste is beautiful. He's always evolving, growing, changing. He comes

Your cut-out-and-keep guide to the best bass parts in Unlimited Love

'Here Ever After' Amid an atmosphere of post-punk-influenced rawness, there lurks a mids-heavy bass tone, and Flea delivers a suitably gritty solo around the three-minute mark.

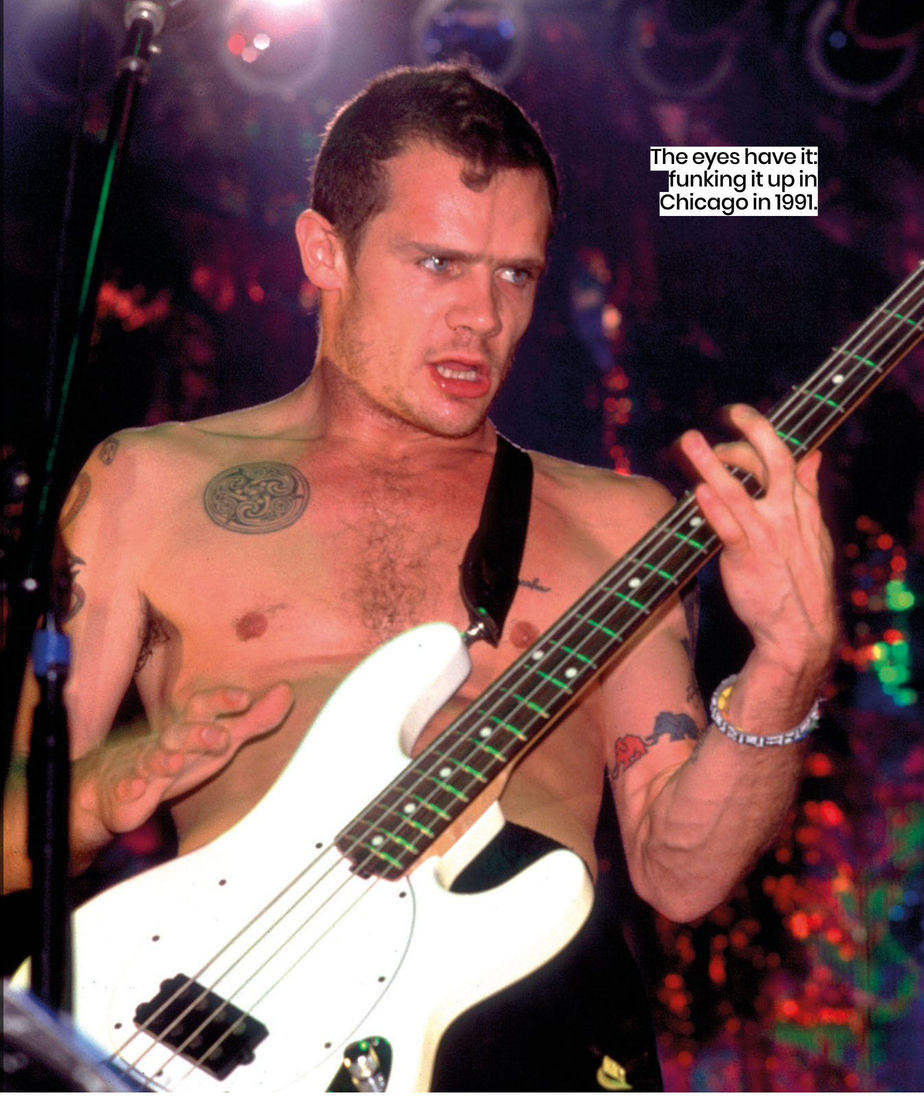
'Aquatic Mouth Dance' Enjoy the funky bass intro, again loaded with grit for a very 'real' sound; watch out for his pyrotechnic display towards the end of the song.

'The Great Apes' There are a lot of ballads on this album, and we do mean a lot, but the great thing about that is there's tons of room for expressive bass parts. Flea does his best Hendrix impression here, so stand well clear.

'White Braids And Pillow Chair' Listen out for the busy bass sixteenths at this song's end, the point at which Flea seems to spread out on most of the tracks on this album.

'One Way Traffic' With a cool bass groove in the intro, plenty of high-register busy parts at the end, a touch of overdrive and some massive string-bends, this is the bass song to focus on.

© Paul Natkin/Getty



The eyes have it: funking it up in Chicago in 1991.

from the purest place, with the most integrity, and with all of that said, the thing that has been such a joy for me, playing with him this time around, is the humility that comes with that sparseness. He has no desire, anywhere in him, to show off. He just wants to make great music. His vision of the music is so beyond ego. He'll write a beautiful chord progression and melody, and within that, he trusts me just to do my thing.

On the same subject, we all start our careers wanting to show off our bass chops, and then as we mature, that falls away. When did that happen for you?

I don't know that I ever really had that desire, consciously anyways, to be a show-off. Of course, I loved Jaco and Stanley Clarke and Marcus Miller and all these great bass players, but I was more about having my own sound and my own style that sounded like me. Maybe that's where my arrogance was, especially in the early Chili Peppers stuff where I'm very busy, with fast 16th notes slapped aggressively. I'm into punk rock, and the funk that I love kind of comes through the vehicle of the punk rock aggression that I was feeling in the street as a kid, you know. I don't know… I always loved sweet, mellow bass playing, too. It just didn't really make sense for me to do it. Even back then when I was playing all that fast stuff, we would do a song like 'Baby Appeal' [from RHCP's eponymous debut album, 1984], where it was just so simple. I love bands with really simple bass-lines, like Gang Of Four or Echo & The Bunnymen. Around the time we made *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, I definitely felt the value in really simple bass playing. At the time I was super into Neil Young and the sound of the Crazy Horse bass player, Billy Talbot. It was so heavy. He would just hit a root and a quarter note and it would fucking shake your insides out with the beauty and the heaviness of it. But at the same time, I could never shy away from the heaviness of Charlie Mingus's fastest, most brutal attack. Man, I love Mingus so much.

> *"I hope I'm better than I was 30 years ago. I'm always discovering things, trying to develop"*

Has it occurred to you that in early 2022, it's 30 years since 'Under The Bridge' and the other *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* singles came out?

I hadn't thought about it. Once a while, I'll look on social media and I'll see people saying that it's the 20-year anniversary or the 30-year anniversary of something, and I'll think 'That's cool'. You know, I'm grateful that people care, but I'm thinking more like 'Shit, I gotta work on my soloing, because I haven't been practising enough'. The lightness and the weight of time is something that I feel every day, like every human being, you know, and especially as I get older, I'm just grateful to be a human, ha ha!

Are you playing bass now the same way you were 30 years ago?

I hope that I'm better. I mean, I *feel* like I'm better. I'm always discovering things, you know, and trying to develop. I like to think that the best parts of myself back then, I've kept, and that I've gotten rid of the bits that I don't need. I'll try to add more essential parts and I'll get better. You know, I really want to be a good jazz bass player – that's something I really want to do, whenever I get the time. I was studying with someone for a little while, around the time I finished tracking on the last Chili Peppers album. I was studying jazz with this girl whose husband plays saxophone on our record, just working on trying to play through changes on walking bass, because upright bass is the most comforting sound to me. I remember when we were tracking *Californication*, we were all sitting around the studio lounge, and John was asking everybody in the room, 'What's the real comfort music that you put on and it's like breathing?' I realised that for me, it's jazz, mostly because I liked it when I was a kid. I just don't know how to play a lot of that

Inside 'Give It Away'

A nostalgic look back at arguably Flea's finest hour, taken from *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (1991).

One of the high points of *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* is the most obviously 'Chili Pepper'-sounding song on it, the relentless 'Give It Away'. Plucked straight from the drawer marked *Mother's Milk*, the song was and remains the finest extant example of modern white funk to emerge in years. Nowadays the long-time RHCP fan will not be able to hear its opening salvo – a ringing, string-bent chord from John Frusciante plus Chad Smith's staccato snare – without punching the air. Like its big-rock-single contemporaries of the time – Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' – 'Give It Away' has been a club staple for so long that it inevitably evokes early-Nineties emotions.

But there's a reason why 'Give It Away' has become such a benchmark: it is, without a doubt, one of the catchiest singles to be released in the last couple of decades. Once heard, it sticks deep in the listener's ear and will not be removed. The core of this catchiness is twofold. Firstly, Flea's simple, elegant bass-line – a simple upper-register slide with a three-note tail – is among his most effective work to date, taking the less-is-more philosophy which he had often spoken of on the *BSSM* album to an elevated level. Only on two or three occasions does he drop in one of the deft fills for which he had become famous, making the whole effort a masterclass in economy.

Flea's reputation as a killer bass player had almost seen him lured away at one point. "John Lydon," Anthony Kiedis once reported, "once made a great stab at poaching Flea for Public Image… And Malcolm McLaren tried to poach the whole band. He sat down with us, watched us rehearse, and then he said, 'Okay, here's the plan, guys. We're going to simplify the music completely, so it's just basic, old-school, simple three-chord rock'n'roll, and we'll have Anthony be the focus of attention, and you guys will be the back-up band doing this surf-punk thing.' At which point Flea keeled over and passed out. It could have been what we had smoked – we were very dysfunctional at that point – but I think it was more what McLaren said."

Secondly, Kiedis' vocal – the closest to a rap, rather than singing, that he comes on this record – hangs on a repeated boast of 'Give it away, give it away, give it away now', all of which he enunciates perfectly in couple of seconds at most. It's a fantastic piece of vocal acrobatics and is all the more remarkable since Kiedis is not known for the speed or dexterity of his vocals, before or since.

The song made a profound impact. Kiedis later explained: "I was toy shopping in New York right before Christmas, and this little girl was tugging on her mom's coat, pointing at me and going, 'That's him, that's him'. And her mom came over and said, 'Oh, I've just got to thank you, you've made my life so much easier'. She said the only way she could get her little girl dressed in the morning was to play our record and sing to her. And to me, the appreciation of a child is the ultimate compliment."

© Frans Schellekens/Redferns

A smokin' Dutch gig in 1989 (from left): Flea, Chad Smith, Anthony Kiedis, John Frusciante.

Unplugged at the ReAct Now charity concert in 2005.

© Amanda Edwards/Getty

shit,so that's something I'm always quietly aspiring to.

Presumably you could do a jazz project on the side if you wanted to?
I could, I could. I would love to, but my professional life has always been such that it's difficult to go develop something like that.

How do you maintain your chops?
Well, when we're on tour, I'm playing so much. We're playing gigs all the time, and I play scales for an hour before every show. Something about the Chili Peppers is that never for a second have we ever taken the audience for granted, or thought 'We'll just go out and play the hits'. I always take every show as a sacred moment, as part of a mission of being alive. So I keep my chops up. I'm ready. I'm ready!

> "I want to expand my cerebral knowledge. And I want to rock harder than ever!"

How are the hands and shoulders holding up after 40 years of playing bass?
Strong as ever. I practise, but I also know when it's time to rest. I'm keen on physical fitness, which I really think is a big thing. I can't speak for everyone, but for myself, my feelings get deeper and my insight gets deeper as you get older. In order to be able to articulate feelings and insight, you have to take care of your body. I think that's true at all times of life, but you become more conscious of it as you get older. I'm going to be 60 on my next birthday, and I have lots of friends who can't be bothered. You know, I get it. I have a lazy streak like a motherfucker, but if you choose to do something, you want to do it as well as you can, and I care about happiness and longevity too.

When you go out on tour, will you be taking your '61 Jazz, or the Fender signature model based on it, or both?
I'll bring a variety of Fenders. I usually leave the '61 at home, or I'll use it as my hotel-room bass, you know. With old basses like that, with those old pickups, it's hard to articulate the fast stuff, like 'Nobody Weird Like Me'. A more modern, active pickup situation works better in a stadium or an arena.

Ever tempted to bust out a Modulus bass for old times' sake?
I could, but then the amp settings and stuff would all have to change. I'm actually switching amps on this tour for the first time in a long, long time. In the studio, I started playing Ampeg SVTs, and I'm switching to them live. To be honest, I've always thought it doesn't fucking matter. You're bringing your heart and your fingers and that's all that really matters, but I've been really enjoying them – they are the centre and the character of the sound that I love.

What have you got left to achieve?
I want to be a good musician, man.

You don't think you've reached that point yet?
Well, I have my thing, you know, but I want to be better. The specific goals I have as a bass player are that I want to become a better soloist, and I want to expand my cerebral knowledge of chord progressions and bass-lines, so I can be a good jazz bass player. And I want to fucking rock harder than ever. I want to stir the souls of human beings when we play. And I want to be a good bandmate – I want to connect with my bandmates, and be a great support to them and help them be the best they can be. I love my band and I'm really proud of the music we've recorded. I feel like it's beautiful. I feel like it's the best we can do. I feel like we're firing on all cylinders and at the top of our game, and I just want to continue to do all those things.

What makes you happy, Flea?
Love. I try to live a life where I'm creating it, where I'm building bridges, even with people who I really disagree with. I try to build bridges with different communities where I live, with different people. That's very important to me. I just really hope that we can build bridges of love everywhere we go. I think that's where happiness lies in the future. The possibility for it lies within all of us.

***Unlimited Love* is out on April 1.**
Info: https://redhotchilipeppers.com

WILL POWER

Will Lee has done more in his career than any 10 other bass players, including the small matter of 6,000 Letterman shows, but he's not resting on his laurels just yet.

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

If you're looking for some fresh music, made by a virtuoso band but never self-indulgent in nature, check out *Look Up!*, by Band Of Other Brothers, the quintet of James Taylor and Toto keyboard player Jeff Babko, Steely Dan and Sting drummer Keith Carlock, Dave Matthews and Bela Fleck sax player Jeff Coffin, Keyon Harrold guitarist Nir Felder, and bassist Will Lee, for whom a couple of credits won't suffice as there are literally thousands of them.

Lee is best known for a third of a century – yes, that's right – on primetime TV with *The Late Show With David Letterman*, where he held down the low end from its first line-up in 1982 through to Letterman's retirement in 2015.

Along the way, and since then, he has racked up an astounding number of stage and studio performances, up there with the career tallies of fellow bass stalwarts Lee Sklar, Chuck Rainey and the session-bassist godparents, Carol Kaye and Ron Carter. He's still as creative as ever, though, with three songs composed for the new Band Of Other Brothers album and a vocal performance on Jeff Babko's 'Right Now Blues'.

Tell us about *Look Up!*, Will.

It was recorded during the pandemic. The whole concept of it came around when one of our members, Nir Felder the guitarist, said, 'We're stuck in our places. We haven't done an album in a couple of years. Why don't we see if we can put something together?' As soon as he said that, I got super inspired and I shot an idea past everybody that I had for a song called 'Cassie'.

That song has a bass solo by none other than Stanley Clarke.

I already had that song in the works, but it was incomplete, and I realised there was a nice place for a bass solo in it. I was playing along with these changes that I came up with, trying to channel my inner Stanley Clarke, and I said 'Wait a minute. I know Stanley!' So I called him up and asked him if he'd be game for taking a listen. He liked it, and he played a beautiful acoustic solo, starting out on arco.

It was great to hear an acoustic bass solo over an electric bass.

Yes. I loved not having to do it myself!

> "A groove is a groove is a groove. If it feels good now, it's always going to feel good!"

He has a new signature EBS preamp, which is quite expensive but it's amazing.

He told me all about that, but you know, if you're really serious, and you want quality, you have to pay for it.

On the same subject, Tim Commerford of Rage Against The Machine told us recently that his signature Ernie Ball costs a lot of money, but he would rather have it that way if it means no-one has been exploited in a sweatshop to make it.

Well, it's the same story with my signature Sadowsky. I was hoping it could be like $300, but they said to me, 'Will, do you want quality?' And I had already been down that road with other companies, doing a signature bass that cut a lot of corners and was unreliable. I didn't want that, so mine costs between $3000 and $6000. It's really nice to have something that's roadworthy and is going to work every time you pick it up.

© Al Pereira/Getty

You've had your Sadowsky for some years now, correct?
Yeah, probably about five or six years, and here's a perfect example of having a bass be reliable. I was playing a gig at the Bitter End in New York one night, and somehow the preamp malfunctioned on the bass that I was playing, which wasn't designed so that it worked without a preamp. I had invited my good friend Willie Weeks to sit next to the stage at the Bitter End to see this gig. It was the first time he had been back to the Bitter End since he played on Donny Hathaway's *Live* album in 1972, so it was a really important moment for me – and then the bass stopped working. Luckily, a guy in the audience had a bass and handed it to me while my wife went home and grabbed my Sadowsky.

Are you still doing sessions in as great a volume as you always have?
Not during the pandemic: I've done work on 40 albums or so in the last couple of years. It's not the same as it used to be, you know – in New York, years ago, you could play from three to seven sessions a day. The studios were flourishing, and musicians were just running back and forth from place to place. I think New York may be the only place that you could book that many things in one day, anyway, because of how close these studios were together. They were all in a three- or four-block radius, for the most part.

When was that peak?
The Eighties, and then it all started to wane as the Nineties crept in.

Because keyboards were able to create realistic bass parts by then?
Actually, I don't think a keyboard could ever really do a bass performance for real. I used to have a sample company where we actually did this. I performed a lot of things – you know, different lines and slides and fills – because the only things that existed before that was just really stiff-sounding samples of sounds, no matter what you did.

So, you're still doing a bit of session work.
Well, I'm doing what I can, you know. I'm a terrible engineer, but I've figured out how to record bass for people's projects, so I can do that. Don't ask me to mix it, though, because everything will just be loud.

I think people who don't understand mixing think it's easy.
Well, yeah. Let me give you a small tip. This is something I learned pretty recently, and it's very basic. You know when you're being told the directions by somebody when you're lost, and they tell you to back up, but you'd rather just go around the world another time? I'll be mixing along, and I'll get frustrated with not being able to hear something in the music, so I'll just make it louder – until everything gets loud. An engineer said to me, 'Look, turn everything else *down*'. To me, that's the equivalent of backing up the car, but that's the secret. That's the thing to do if you get stuck like that, because my bass was getting really distorted, and I was getting frustrated that I couldn't make it groove anymore. The groove was gone, because everything was getting so washed out with massiveness.

How do you record your parts remotely?
I usually plug into a Universal Audio Interface and then use Logic. That's another rabbit hole, because you can go nuts with plugins. I thought I was going crazy with all the plugins, but I just had a session with my engineer back in New York a couple of days ago. I told him about my dilemma of having too many plugins, and he said, 'Well, I have 150 equaliser plugins', so then I didn't feel so bad.

When you play live, will you take an amplifier out with you?
I will probably, yeah, I'll probably have the Aguilar

© Bob Berg/Getty

On stage with the mighty Warren Haynes in 2008.

people drop one off for me. I use their 751. I love the 750, but they don't make it anymore.

And will you use effects as well?
I sometimes use a pedalboard, but a lot of times I use a Boss GT-10B just because it's amazing and easy to program.

I'd like to ask you about Letterman. Was it really 33 years that you were on that show?
It was actually 33 and a third, from the beginning of February '82 to the middle of May 2015.

Was is as much fun as it looked?
I think it was probably more fun in the first 30 years, because it got a little routine when we had a bigger band, and it moved slower and it wasn't as spontaneous. At the beginning, we were booked for 13 weeks. I'd never had 13 weeks of guaranteed work in my life, so it was super exciting. But you know, on the first show in 1982, I thought 'This is really not going to fly. This is not going to go past 13 weeks'. Sure enough, after 13 weeks, we got a renewal for another 13-week contract, and then we could start to feel things happening, like bigger sponsors coming in – and all of a sudden, you realise they're about to give you a three-year contract. That's when we knew it was a hit show, for real, but it was really touch and go for the first while. That was exciting, you know? That make-or-break sort of lifestyle. There's a lot of energy around that.

So what lies ahead for you?
Well, I'm really trying to finish a lot of songs that I started. When I write songs, it's usually not the Band Of Other Brothers sort of music as much as singer-songwriter stuff. Lyrics are the hardest part of writing a song to me, because I don't want to try to go over anybody's head with my music. I want to try to keep it simple. I'm looking for those musical moments that aren't going to impress jazz guys.

It's been nine years since you did your third solo album, *Love, Gratitude And Other Distractions*. Will there be a fourth?
I might be doing one right now without knowing it. That's what happened last time. I had a couple of things in the can, and I said, 'Wait a minute, if I do one more song, it'll start to feel like an album here'. You know, when you don't have a concept for an album, and you're stringing together a bunch of songs, the biggest challenge is sequencing them. The gal who is now my wife had a copy of my first album, and on it was a sweet ballad which was very soothing. She would go to sleep to the song, because it had long notes and a choir and Jeff Beck playing a beautiful guitar solo. She would drift off to that song every night, but the next song that came up was incredibly loud. It drove her nuts, because she would leap off the bed every day in terror. So I need to avoid that next time.

Are you going to write an autobiography?
Isn't that what this is? No, I don't think so, but I don't know. I'm not really an author of books. I was thinking if a guy like [acclaimed ghostwriter] David Ritz came along and said, 'I insist on doing this with you', I would.

In full flow in NYC, 2014.
© Brian Killian/WireImage

The reason I ask is that all those years on that amazing show would be of great interest to the people who loved it.
Well, it was a ride. I miss a few of the people there, not the job itself, because I think I had enough. You know, how greedy can you get?

Are you evolving as a bass player over the years?
Well, I would hope so.

In what way?
Lately, I've been trying to work on a combination of using whatever musicality that I have, and whatever experience that I have accumulated, with what works musically, not only to my own taste, but trying to bear in mind what the artist and producer and everybody else who's got an opinion is going to think about what I did. When I listen to stuff that I've done in the past there are lots of regrets – like, 'Oh man, why did I do that? Why didn't I just lay out there?' All that shoulda woulda stuff. I try to avoid those things, and try to make something that's not only feeling good in this moment, but will always feel good down the road. And another thing that I've learned, and you can quote me on this, is that a groove is a groove is a groove. If it really feels good now, it's always going to feel good.

Info: http://willlee.com

BEAT THIS

The art of writing bass parts that are neither too experimental nor too boring, explained by **Kaspar Larsen** of Denmark's premier rock exports, Volbeat

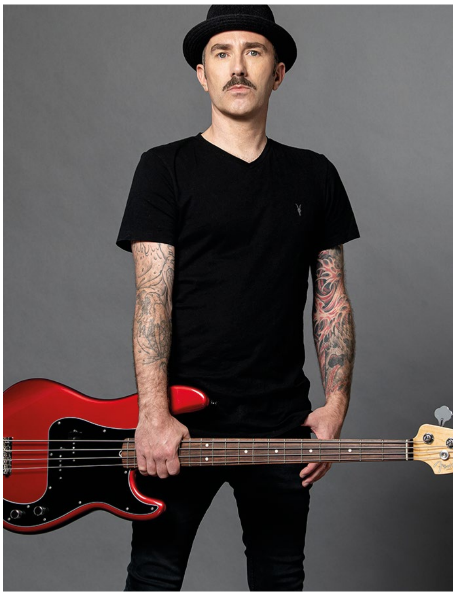
In 2020, the Danish rock band Volbeat took a break from touring thanks to the pandemic. Their guitarist Rob Caggiano (formerly of Anthrax) is based in New York, so the other three musicians – bassist Kaspar Larsen, singer/guitarist Michael Poulsen and drummer John Larsen – continued to rehearse a couple of times a week. As the affable bass player explains, "Michael started bringing a riff or maybe half a song into the rehearsing room, and pretty soon we found out that we were going to do at least an EP. Michael just kept on bringing in new songs, though, and within two or three months, we had 13 or 14 new songs. He was just on fire!"

Talk to us about your new album, *Servant Of The Mind*.
We went to the studio in the summer and took three days to demo the songs, and then we booked some more time in October. I think we did three or four weeks – it went really fast. The album was pretty much done within two and a half weeks, and we had a lot of time left over, so we thought 'Why don't we do a couple of cover songs?' One of them was 'Domino' by The Cramps, and we were also listening to a band called Wolfbrigade from Sweden, which is like a crust-punk thrash kind of band, so we did their song 'Return To None' as well. We got a phone call on one of the last days in the studio, asking if we were interested in doing 'Don't Tread On Me', a song from Metallica's Black Album for their 30th anniversary project, so we squeezed that in too.

How do you write your bass parts?
On the previous album, *Rewind, Replay, Rebound*, I was working a lot with Rob on the bass-lines, because before I joined Volbeat in 2016 I was playing a lot of hardcore and metal – really aggressive music that is more riff-based. Coming into Volbeat it was a little bit different, because you have a lot of chord-based choruses and verses – it's very different to just playing riffs. So to get in the mood of creating bass-lines, I was working a lot with Rob on that last album, which gave me ideas about what to do on future songs. This time, I was all on my own, and free to do anything I wanted. I experimented a lot, but some of the ideas I had were maybe a little bit too much when we finally recorded it, so we changed them.

Can you give us an example?
Well, maybe there was a lick that was a little bit too much, so I scaled it down. When we have chord progressions, instead of just playing the root note, I really like to play an almost walking bass-line. 'The Devil Rages On' is an example. It has this kind of rockabilly beat, so I mimicked an upright bass on the bass guitar. And then, on a totally different song like 'The Sacred Stones', I wanted a different feeling – more of a Geezer Butler kind of vibe. We go from pop-punk to rockabilly to Black Sabbath-inspired riff-based songs on this album, and the bass is a big part of the sound.

> **"We go from pop-punk to rockabilly to Sabbath-inspired riffing on this album"**



What's your history as a bass player?
When I started playing bass, I was in a melodic death metal band called Withering Surface. I was very young and I played with my fingers at the time, but after a couple of albums, I found out that the thing I wanted to do just didn't fit in with a death metal band, so I started to play with a pick. I scaled down all my licks and all of the ideas I had. For many years, I was just playing riffs with a pick, but then I joined Volbeat and I really got the feeling of being a bass player back, because suddenly there was room for interesting bass-lines. I play faster and better, I think, with my fingers.

That's unusual for a band as heavy as yours.
I feel that when I was playing with a pick, I didn't have the same control and I couldn't play as fast. It's just not the same. A pick is good when you're just hammering on the low E string, and going nuts and playing fast. It's great, because it's got a tone to it that's a little more aggressive, but in this band it's great to have the dynamics in the individual notes that you have when you play with your fingers. It doesn't sound as tight on every note, but that's the natural dynamic.

What bass gear do you use?
On tour I'm using an Ampeg SVT Pro. We have a couple of those, and then I use an Ampeg DI and compressor. That's actually my lifeline, because there's a lot happening at the front of house – he might be using some plugins on the sound, but I'm not sure. When we recorded the album I used a distortion pedal called a Brutalist Jr., made by Kurt Ballou from Converge. It sounds amazing. It's got a very nice grit to it that sounds a little bit old-school. I don't like my bass to have too much high end – I want it to sound more like a Seventies tube distortion, like an angry bear. As for basses, I have two Fender Precisions, one in standard tuning and one for some songs that are detuned. I use Ernie Ball strings, although I haven't broken a single string since I joined this band.

What was your first bass?
The first bass I ever bought was a used Rickenbacker 4001 copy with a bolt-on neck. It sounded great. After that I had a few other cheap basses, but when I started playing death metal, I bought an original 4001 from 1974. I also had a Gibson Thunderbird from

© Scott Legato/Getty

> "Coming from a small town in Denmark, there was no-one who wanted to play punk, so the next best thing was to join a death metal band"

1992, I think. That had a great bottom end to it. I also started playing punk rock in the late Nineties, which was when I got my first P-Bass. It just sounded fucking awesome. I had that for some years and then I joined Volbeat. For the first year I was using a Schecter bass, but then I got a deal with Fender. These P-Basses are the best basses I've ever played – they're so easy to play.

How did you get into bass?
I didn't have any interest in music until my sister got a record by The Cure in 1987. It was the *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me* album. Suddenly, something just happened inside me. I don't know what it was, but something triggered in me and I got really into The Cure. From there, I moved onto punk rock and goth and hardcore. I saw these pictures of Sid Vicious playing bass, and he just looked so cool. I knew that he couldn't play that well, but looking at Sid, I thought, 'I've gotta play bass'. I come from a small town in Denmark, and there was no-one there who wanted to play punk rock, so the next best thing was to join a death metal band with other people that also couldn't really play. I still live in that little town now.

Which bassists do you most admire?
Like I say, it started with The Cure. Simon Gallup has always been a favourite of mine. I've seen 18 shows by The Cure and I've never heard him make even one tiny mistake. The bass is such a big part of their sound. They've got their own melody going. And then, of course, there was the first Black Sabbath album with the bass solos by Geezer Butler.

What's next for you?
We go out in mid-May for a lot of festival shows, and then we go out again in late August, September, for a full-scale European tour. We've been doing nothing for two years, apart from recording the album, of course: it's the first time since I started playing bass that I haven't played a show in two years. I feel like we should compensate for that this year.

You must have built up a lot of energy.
It's just bursting to get out. Anyway, thank you for this interview. It's nice to talk just about bass. I've been doing a lot of interviews, but no-one ever talks about my bass playing because no-one cares. But you do!

***Servant Of The Mind* is out now.**
Info: www.volbeat.dk

BONNIE BUITRAGO, NASHVILLE PUSSY

© Raphael Meert

POWER TONES

Nashville Pussy make all other bands look like weaklings. We meet their powerhouse bassist **Bonnie Buitrago** for a dose of rock

Scott Reeder says...

"I reamp bass tracks for friends via email a bit, but it sure is a lot more fun when a bassist comes out to our ranch to track – especially if that person is Bonnie Buitrago! Between my amps, her basses, and our combined pedals, we always get some great tones to work with; and then she just rips through it all. She's obviously got the chops and has a great sonic instinct for 'the Heavy', whether in her band, on her solo stuff, or guesting on Bala's blistering new record. Always a pleasure!"

© Phillip Faraone/WireImage

As live albums go, *Eaten Alive* by the perennial noiseniks Nashville Pussy does an efficient job, injecting a charge of over-the-top anarchy into what is shaping up to be a rather better year, musically speaking, than the last couple. Ask bassist Bonnie Buitrago to describe it and she reflects: "We're super happy with how it sounds – downright ferocious! It was recorded across England, Scotland and Wales by our soundman, David Bennett. And now I've been in the band for 10 years, I'm happy to finally have a live album that represents what we're all about in the present day."

She continues: "Another new album that I'm a part of is *Maleza*, by a duo from Galicia, Spain called Bala. I recorded my bass tracks and Spanish vocal parts for the album on a few songs at Scott Reeder's recording studio in California, the Sanctuary. I got to record through the Ampeg SVT that used on Kyuss' *Welcome To Sky Valley* album, and my personal favourite was a Bison amp that's one of a kind – it has the gnarliest heavy tone."

Asked how she got into bass, Buitrago tells us: "A bassist friend passed on his first bass to me, just to see if I'd like playing it. He told me, 'You're pretty good on that guitar, but how about you try playing this?' It was a no-brand, handmade, Teisco-like, short-scale, tobacco burst, little beast of a bass with a sweet overdriven fuzz to it. I still have it, but I didn't really take to bass playing full-on until many years later. My first 'real' bass was a Les Paul semi-hollow knock off full-scale, that I used up until I got my Rickenbacker, which is one of my main basses to this day. That was a turning point in my life. I traded my guitar for that Rickenbacker, and never looked back."

Talking of gear, she adds: "On the last tour Nashville Pussy had in Europe, my Sixties SVT head blew up. We were on our way to the UK, and Orange amps HQ came to the rescue with a Terror Bass head. I love it! It's the amp I use on *Eaten Alive*. It's got clarity, low end and growl. I also use a Satellite tube preamp and a custom Creepy Fingers distortion. My basses are the same as always – an Eighties Fender Precision Special that has been with me across the world and on every album with Nashville Pussy, and for low tuning, a 1979 Rickenbacker 4003 and 1980 Peavey T-40."

On the subject of bass influences, she explains: "I was pretty into thrash metal, and that's a genre easily played alone in your bedroom for years! But I was always fascinated by punk bass, which I didn't pursue playing until later in life when I started my old band, Bloodhook. When I dove into singing and playing bass together live for the band, I felt I found what I connected to most."

Buitrago names Larry 'The Mole' Taylor of Canned Heat as a major influence, explaining: "I can't listen to his playing without wanting to pick up my bass. I love how his lines bounce. Coincidentally, Nashville Pussy found Canned Heat hanging out in our hotel lobby in Bilbao, Spain one night on tour. We got to talking and heard so many amazing stories from those guys. Larry told me about playing Woodstock, and also how Lux and Ivy from the Cramps would often come over to his house to sift through his record collection. They got the idea to cover 'Green Door' for their *Psychedelic Jungle* album from discovering the original on his turntable. I love the Cramps, so hearing this story from him was quite a treat. Larry will forever live on my turntable! He is greatly missed."

What's the best advice she's ever been given about playing bass? "Never stop rocking! Sometimes you gotta just hear the right words, from the right person, at the right time, for encouragement to keep playing and to stick with it. As Lemmy once told Blaine, our singer, 'Play till you drop!'"

Nashville Pussy are touring the world in 2022. Info: www.nashvillepussy.com, www.bonniebuitrago.com

Rocking out with guitarist Ruyter Suys.

© Lykh'Arts

BROTHER GRIM

With their eighth album, *Hushed And Grim*, progressive metallers Mastodon have decided to double up. That's a whole lot of bass from **Troy Sanders**...

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

The concept of the double album has always been suspect. How many truly great double LPs can you name? *Songs In The Key Of Life*, *Electric Ladyland*, 'The White Album' perhaps, but beyond those, you're stepping into "Why not take the best 10 songs and make it a single album?" territory.

However, the double album's murky history hasn't deterred the Atlanta metal quartet Mastodon from the format, with their new one, *Hushed And Grim*, extending to 15 cuts. Fortunately, when we meet bassist Troy Sanders, he knows exactly what the pitfalls of a double entail.

"We know it's a lot to absorb!" he chuckles. "There's a lot of drums, and a lot of guitars on there – and even for our biggest fans, an hour and a half of a new record is a lot. *Hushed And Grim* is basically six years' worth of albums for us, because we release an album every three years, so a double never seemed like a reality.

"We always tossed around the idea, though, and in March of 2020, when everything shut down, we were towards the end of our last record and touring cycle, *Emperor Of Sand*, which came out in 2017. That feels like such a long ago now... Anyway, usually we'll go back home after a tour and collect new ideas for songs, record them and release them on the traditional cycle, which has been healthy and fabulous for us for 20 years. But when everything got cancelled because of the pandemic, we were like, 'If those tours aren't going to happen, how soon can we start diving into new material?' Within a few months, we realised we had close to 30 song skeletons ready to go."

Jamming on the new songs, the four musicians – Sanders plus guitarists Brent Hinds and Bill Kelliher, and drummer Brann Dailor – soon realised that they had the proverbial nice problem to have: too much material.

"We got to song 15," says Sanders, "and we said, 'Okay, we need to pump the brakes for a second'. We decided to hone in on those 15 songs and pick the nine or 10 best ones out of the bunch – but I couldn't think of one song to cut, much less six. We were all deeply attached to each one of the 15. Brann and I were sitting there, talking about it, and I remember saying, 'Dude, I don't even know one song to cut. I like them all very, very much'. And Brann said, 'Tell me one reason why we shouldn't do a double album'."

> **"*Hushed And Grim* is six years' worth of albums for us, because we release an album every three years"**

Instead of supplying the traditional answer – "because doubles are too long and no-one will buy it" – Sanders and his band opted to stay optimistic in the face of received commercial wisdom. "You know what? In this time of short attention spans and EPs and singles, let's just flip it and do a double album," he reasons. "*Hushed And Grim* feels like a complete body of work, and what's really important is that the material on this record ranges from odd to slow to dark to moody. It's not a double album of in-your-face, heavy-as-hell Mastodon. That would just be overload, to even the most hardcore fan."

You'd think with 15 tracks to play with, there would be room for a bass solo – and fans

© Scott Legato/Getty

of Sanders' deft playing will be delighted to learn that there's one tucked away in the back end of the first single, 'Teardrinker'. You might miss it, though, because it sounds a bit like a synth or heavily treated guitar.

"When we were writing the song," says Sanders, "the guitar players wrote two bridge parts that would be perfect for guitar solos, one on each of them. We were listening to them, and trying to figure out which part would be better for each guy, and I jokingly said, 'I'll just put a bass solo on the first one, and one of you guys can do a guitar solo on the second'. Everybody giggled, and that was it.

"Well, the next morning, I went to the studio early before everybody got there, and I tracked a loose bass solo on that first bridge part. When the guys showed up, I said, 'Hey, I recorded that bass solo that I was talking about' and played it back to them. They all liked it, so now we had something that turned from a silly joke to an interesting moment that I'd never done in Mastodon before. Any time we can find new musical territory like that, it's exciting for us, because we don't want to ever repeat the same song twice, or have a similar album to the previous one."

Find that solo, listen to it and then come back – Sanders is about to tell us how he got its cool, silky tone. "It was my custom distortion, which is a Wren & Cuff Elephant Skin, and the old Morley wah pedal. I've always considered pedals as your collectibles – you know, your toys! – but the only time I really have a lot of fun with them is in the studio, because we have the time. Live, my effects are very simple – it's just a tuner, my distortion, the Morley wah and either a TC Electronic or an Aguilar chorus, which I swap in and out. So it's four pedals. I'm a pretty simple person. That's the way I am with jeans and shoes, too – it's about comfort."

© Ethan Miller/Getty

The light fantastic: Sanders with signature Jaguar

As for basses, Sanders has a signature Fender Jaguar, which is still his go-to bass. "It's been my dream bass for a good six or seven years. Fender stopped production on it, but I was happy that they gave it that long of a run. I think I was given 10 of them – but I gave quite a few of them away. I also use a Warwick when we tune down to A, because it handles it better than any other bass I've ever had."

Stability and reliability in bass gear is important in this case, we suggest, because Sanders is required to play fast, complex parts while singing. He ponders this: "Well, I've always been a simple bass player. I'm definitely not flashy. That's worked very well with Mastodon, because with two wizard guitar players and a beast of a drummer, there's not much room to do anything except play the part, which I've loved doing. Over the past 10 years, I've probably put more focus on being a better vocalist than a bassist."

He adds: "I treat everything as a challenge, you know. Even it's the simplest riff, I'll think, 'Okay, what's the best thing I can play here? What's the best thing for the song that I can do to the best of my ability?' It seems like there's two ways you can go. You can become complacent in your band and be like, 'We've achieved this amount of status. We're doing okay, so let's just chill out and just do what we need to do'. Or you can do your very best. Thankfully, all four of us try to do that. I say it all the time, but you know, we started as a band in 2000, at the very bottom of the mountain – and I feel like we continue to ascend that mountain to this day. The well of our creativity is far from dry."

Hushed And Grim* *is out now.
Info: www.mastodonrocks.com

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13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package

EICH AMPLIFICATION

16054 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16055 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16042 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohms
16041 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohms
16075 - Eich 115L Bass Cabinet
16052 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16053 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16040 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16071 - Eich 210M Bass Cabinet
16069 - Eich 212L Bass Cabinet
16070 - Eich 212M Bass Cabinet
16048 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16050 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16068 - Eich 410L Bass Cabinet
16067 - Eich 610L Bass Cabinet
16061 - Eich 612XL Bass Cab
16065 - Eich 810L Bass Cabinet
16321 - Gallien Krueger CX115 Bass Cabinet
16444 - Gallien Krueger CX210 Bass Cab

Mark bass

5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
16013 - Markbass 123 Alain Caron Bass Cab
16014 - Markbass CMD S. Combo K1 Alain Caron
17732 - Markbass Marcus Miller Cab 102
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab

ORANGE

6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
10266 - Orange OBC210 Bass Guitar Speaker Cab
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
23026 - Phil Jones Bass C4 Compact Bass Cab
21040 - D'Addario Planet Waves 5ft Speaker Lead
20753 - Stagg 10M Speakon-Jack Lead
20754 - Stagg 10M Spk-Spk Lead (SSP10SS15)
16856 - Trace Elliot 1x10 Elf Cab
19686 - Trace Elliot TE28E 2×8 bass cabinet

Bass Combos

13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
21842 - Ashdown Studio 12
22943 - Ashdown Studio 15 Bass Amp Combo
22731 - Ashdown Ashdown Studio Jnr
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package

EICH AMPLIFICATION

16046 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
19163 - Eich BC112 PRO Bass Combo
16028 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo

Fender

13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo

GK GALLIEN-KRUEGER

23058 - Gallien Krueger BL115 Backline,Used
16765 - Gallien Krueger MB110 Bass Combo

Mark bass

6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin 300W
5429 - Mark Bass Covers For Mark Bass Amps
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W, 1x12)
18371 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD101 Micro60
18372 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 250
18370 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 500
9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
9939 - Markbass MiniMark 802 Bass Combo
16764 - Markbass 102 250 Richard Bona Bass
19729 - Markbass Ninja 102-500 Combo
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

ORANGE

15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Combo
15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Combo
15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Combo
23007 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Glenn Hughes
22889 - Phil Jones BG400 Suitcase Compact
22786 - Phil Jones Bass Double Four BG-75

Bass Heads

14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
22741 - Ashdown ABM-300-EVO IV Head, Bass Amp
18848 - Bergantino Bi Amp
18854 - Bergantino Custom Padded Carry Bag
18850 - Bergantino Forte Bass Amplifier
21556 - Bergantino NXT210 Bass Cab
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16044 - Eich T1000 Bass Amp
16043 - Eich T300 Bass Amp
16027 - Eich T500 Bass Amp
16026 - Eich T900 Bass Amp
18116 - GR Bass One 800 Pre-Owned
16319 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Fusion Bass Amp H

Mark bass

14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
19081 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head USED
9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
9256 - Markbass Big Bang 500W Bass Head
19484 - Markbass Evo 1 Bass Amp Head
17254 - Markbass Little Marcus 1000 Bass Amp
17252 - Markbass Little Marcus 250 Bass Amp Head
17009 - Markbass Little Marcus 500 Bass Amp Head
17010 - Markbass Little Marcus 800 Bass Amp Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
19282 - Markbass Little Mark Vintage Bass Amp Head
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head

ORANGE

6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
19674 - Orange Little Bass Thing Bass Amp Head
5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head

5 & 6 String Basses

22612 - Charvel Pro-Mod San Dimas Lambo Green
22538 - Cort A5 Beyond Open Pore Bubinga Natural
10232 - Cort GB35J BK 5 String Bass, Black
16526 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Black
21970 - ESP LTD RB1005 Rocco Prestia, Used
16766 - Ibanez SR30TH5PII Premium, 5-String Bass
22085 - MTD Kingston Z 5-String, Sunburst, Used
19381 - Marleaux MBass 5 String Bass, Burl Top
23068 - Overwater Custom 5 String Bass, Red

Rickenbacker

21654 - Rickenbacker 4003S 5 Bass Guitar Jetglo
21655 - Rickenbacker 4003S5 String Bass Mapleglo
22626 - Sandberg California II TM 5-String Bass
23090 - Sandberg California II VM 5 String, Marley Blue
19775 - Shine 5 String Bass, Trans Blue, Used

Spector

19735 - Spector Bass Rebop 5DLX Blck Cherry
16773 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Trans Black
11196 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Classic Blk Cherry
22523 - Spector Bass Leg 5 Cl Blk Cherry Lefty
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
19158 - Sterling by MusicMan SubRay 5 Bass, HBS
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
4889 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Natural

Fretless Basses

23086 - Fender Player Jazz Bass Fretless S.burst
22718 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Ash
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
18933 - Squier C. Vibe 60s Jazz Bass Fretless
14778 - Vintage ICON V74MRJP, Sunburst

Acoustic Basses

23099 - Cordoba Mini II Bass MH-E Mahogany
15117 - Takamine GB30CE Electro-Acoustic Blk

Electric & Silent Basses

14014 - Yamaha SLB100 Silent Upright Bass
19938 - Yamaha SLB300 Silent Double Bass

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

IAN HILL, JUDAS PRIEST

© Neil H Kitson/Redferns

HOLY MAN

Celebrating 50 years of unsociably loud music with a new box set, Judas Priest bassist **Ian Hill** looks back on half a century of breakin' the law

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Getty

Heavy metal fans of a certain age will remember the rise of Judas Priest, the perennial quintet which has ruled the metallic airwaves from 1974 onwards in a variety of line-ups. The sole constant member of the band, which released the self-explanatorily-titled compilation *50 Heavy Metal Years Of Music* last year, is bassist Ian Hill, whose presence at the back of the stage and at the lowest frequency of the songs has been a comforting presence for the band's fans over the decades.

Note that Judas Priest have endured the proverbial rollercoaster ride of a career. Space doesn't permit a full account of their escapades, so let's just say that they defended themselves in court in 1990 after two fans entered a suicide pact; their singer Rob Halford left and returned in the same decade; one guitarist, KK Downing, left un-amicably in 2011; the other one, Glenn Tipton, retired with Parkinson's disease in 2018; and his replacement, Richie Faulkner, narrowly survived an on-stage aortic aneurysm six months ago.

That's quite a ride, and yet here's Ian Hill, talking to us about life in and out of his chaotic band with a smile on his face. Bass players are like that, we find.

How is Richie Faulkner doing?
Richie is a very lucky lad. He actually had two aneurysms, one in his aorta and the other in whatever the other vein is called on the other side of the heart. The paramedics arrived, and 20 minutes later, he was at the hospital, and 20 minutes after that he was in the operating theatre. He's fine now. It looks like nothing's gonna stop Priest just yet.

And now we have a 50-year box set of albums.
That's unbelievable as well, to be honest. People ask me, 'Did you ever think Priest was going to last this long when you started?' I tell them that when we started the band, the concept of somebody doing this sort of thing in their seventies just didn't exist. Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra were only in their fifties and sixties at the time, so they were the old guys when we were teenagers. But it doesn't feel like 50 years, mainly because most of it's been fun. There's been a few dips here and there, but it's been fun.

Would you play your early bass parts differently if you were recording them now?
Oh yeah, I think the whole thing would be done differently. Not drastically differently, but with a few little changes. Everything's beefed up a little bit nowadays, so that would probably be the way it would be recorded now.

> "When we started Priest, the concept of somebody doing this in their seventies didn't exist!"

Generally, your parts have been mixed reasonably high over the years.
For the most part, yes. There were a couple of songs in the Eighties where it was all guitar, basically. All you could hear was a snare drum, if you're lucky. One of the reasons I started playing with a pick was to cut through all of that. With the distorted guitar sound, playing bass with your fingers just vanished into a little rumbling in the background, so the pick helped to clarify everything.

What was the first bass you ever had?
The first one wasn't actually a bass. It was a Watkins

The mighty Priest in Oakland, California, back in 1977

© Richard McCaffrey/ Michael Ochs Archive/ Getty

Rapier guitar, which I took two strings off and put bass strings on. That was the state of affairs back in those days. The string spacing was very odd. The one after that was an old Framus, and my first real one was an Epiphone Rivoli. I wish I'd still got that bass, I really do. It was a beautiful piece of furniture, if nothing else. Unfortunately it whistled. You'd turn it up and you got a whistling noise, so I swapped it for a Danelectro shaped like a Gibson SG Junior. I wish I'd still got that one, too. In the end I swapped that for my first Fender Jazz, which is on the stand right here. It needs a bit of work – the neck is a little bit twisted – but it's still in perfect working order.

You play Spectors now. When did you switch to those?
I think it was around 1984. I was using Hamer basses at the time, because one of the reps – I can't remember his name now – kept pestering me to try one. I said 'Okay, I'll give it a go' and it was really good, so I used those for a while. When we were doing *Defenders Of The Faith* in 1984, I was in Miami for some reason and I went to visit Tom Allom, our producer, at the studio where he was producing a band. There was this beautiful bass there, a Spector, and nobody was around so I had a quick play with it. Somehow I got hold of the rep and he said, 'We're looking for people to endorse these basses' and that was it. They gave me two basses to start with. I still have them, and my ex-wife organised a fretless version for me at Christmas one year, which I still have as well.

© Steve Thorne/Redferns

Hill with signature Spector in full effect

How are they holding up?
Fine. I rotated the two original ones until a crack appeared on the headstock of one of them. The rep at the time went out and sourced another original one for me. And then I got my signature Spector when they were branching out and got factories in the Czech Republic. They have all the woodwork done over there and ship it back to the States where they do the rest.

> "I'm set in my ways. You get used to the string spacing after 40 years on a four-string"

Do you play five-string basses as well?
I used to play five-strings, but I'm an old fart and set in my ways. I string a four-string bass with the top four of a five-string set, and it works out. If I need any higher notes I'll just go further up the neck. You get used to the string spacing after 40 years of a four-string bass.

Do you use a pedalboard?
Yes, but I don't use a great deal of effects. The only two I use are an octave divider for the song 'The Green Manalishi (With The Two Prong Crown)', and a slow fading effect for the beginning of 'Blood Red Skies'.

How do you get your overdrive on the intro of 'Revolution'?
There's a little bit of distortion there, as I recall, but not a great deal, from a Boss multi-effects pedal. I'd tell you the model, but it's in a road case.

What amps do you use?
I'm still with SWR, although they've been out of business for a while. They're brilliant. I use the Triad cabinets, which have 15" and 10" speakers and a horn. I started out using two 900-watt amps, and then I went to the 1500. I've had one of those for years, they're bombproof. I think in all the years I've been using them, which has got to be the early Nineties, I think I've only changed one speaker in one of the cabs. I tried other stuff before that. I was using these huge folded-horn things. I had them built for me by a company in Florida called Acoustic Research. They were great, but you could live in one, they were so huge. When we were with Ripper [Owens, Halford's replacement from 1992 to 2003] we weren't playing such huge places, and it wasn't logistically possible to have them on either side of the stage, so I tried other things and ended up being happy with SWR.

I've seen so many pictures of you standing about six inches away from a massive 8x10 cab.
Fortunately I'm on in-ears and have been since Richie joined the band. I'm sure if I hadn't used them, I'd be stone deaf by now. But that place on the stage comes

Rocking Miami in 2011

© Larry Marano/Getty

from the early days, when the stages were small. I had Glenn right in front of me, so if I stepped just a little bit away I wouldn't be able to hear what I was doing. You'll see me looking to my right, because I'm looking at the left foot of the drummer on the hi-hat. That's how I kept up.

How are the hands holding up after all these years of playing metal?
Not bad. I have a touch of arthritis in one joint, but the rest of them are okay. I massage them before I go on, and I'll do a warm-up. I'll go and play some of the faster songs until the blood starts flowing.

Which bass parts are you most proud of?
Actually, the bass parts on those two Ripper albums [*Jugulator* and *Demolition*, 1997 and 2001] probably had the technically-best bass-lines that I did. There's some good stuff on there. The music was a slightly different style, which lent itself to a busier bass-line. One of my favourite Priest songs is 'Dissident Aggressor'. The bass-line just follows the groove. It's one of those raw rock songs – just two guitars, bass, drums and vocal, with only the solos overdubbed.

Who were the bass players who influenced you?
My big influence was Jack Bruce. I loved Jack, as a huge Cream fan. He was absolutely unbelievable. Even now, I listen back to some of the live stuff they used to do. They'd just ramble off for 15 minutes on these huge adventures, and even now, I can't figure out some of the stuff he did. His album *Songs For A Tailor* was one of the most underrated records ever. It takes a minute to get your head around it. I regret never meeting the bloke, I really do.

Who else was an influence?
All the old blues players – you know, Andy Fraser, John McVie. John Entwistle of course. And later on, Jaco Pastorius was an absolute giant. Tragically, his career was cut short, but he was phenomenal.

Did you ever learn to play slap bass?
No, that was a different technique altogether. I never bothered to learn it.

What are the plans for 2022?
We're off to Europe in the summer for the festivals, and then the plan was always to go back to America again. And then we'll see how the rest of the world is faring, you know. We've still got to fit in South America and Japan and maybe Southeast Asia, and maybe there'll be an album in due course. There's already more than an album's worth of material.

> **"Maybe there will be an album in due course. There's already more than enough material..."**

Time to embark on the next half-century, then?
Yes. I was joking about that with Richie. Now they've put all these metal parts in him, they reckon it's given him another 50 years of life. So off we go!

***50 Heavy Metal Years Of Music* is out now.**
Info: www.judaspriest.com

NASHVILLE NOTES

Electric and upright bassist **Mandy Schucher** on the perils of overplaying

How did you get started on bass?
During my second semester of studying Commercial Music at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, the bass department coordinator talked me into taking bass lessons and participating in some ensembles. I made an instant connection with the instrument and never looked back. I spent four years studying at SPC before I moved to Austin, then to Nashville in 2006.

What was your first bass?
The first year or so, I learned to play on a Mexican Fender P-Bass and a Modulus five-string which I borrowed from the school because I couldn't afford my own. When I was finally able to make a purchase, I bought a Fender Roscoe Beck V after watching Roscoe at a local music store clinic in 2002. I now own three of them!

What gear do you currently use?
I primarily use my Roscoe Beck IV for electric gigs, paired with my Ampeg V4B and 212 cab. I have an EBS MicroBass 3 that I use for fly dates or gigs with a house rig or no rig. Most of my shows are with country or Americana artists, so I don't use many effects, just a compressor and the occasional EBS Valve Drive. On upright gigs I bring along an LR Baggs Session DI. For sessions, I like to use my Ampeg SVT-DI. I have a variety of tools, but these are the ones I gravitate towards.

Where can we hear you play?
You can catch me live in Nashville with Andrea Guess at various venues around town, or on tour with the Wildcards. I also produced and played on Andrea's latest EP *New Beginnings*, and you can hear me on Ward Davis' *Black Cats And Crows* and Crystal Bowersox's *The Stuff*. I have other album credits listed on my website.

Which bass player do you most admire?
I really admire Bob Glaub as a player and a person. He's a masterful player and embodiment of being intentional with every note. He is also one of the kindest and most generous people I've met in this industry.

Give us some bass advice.
Be intentional. Make the part you are playing a meaningful contribution to the story of the song, or else it's just a distraction. It's easy to sometimes fall into the temptation of overplaying – but that makes the moments that could be genius get lost in a barrage of unnecessary notes.

Info: www.fclef9.com

LUCKY STAR

Lottery Winners bassist **Katie Lloyd** tells Chloe Peacock about the importance of staying positive in the pandemic era

Having had a busy two years, releasing their debut album, an EP and a series of hilarious TV programmes over lockdown called *LWTV*, the Manchester-based quartet Lottery Winners have also recorded their second album this winter, and collaborated with a whole host of famous faces. We ask their bassist Katie Lloyd how they've remained so prolific through these troubled times.

"My mother is a singer and my dad is a bass player, so as a kid I just grew up sitting side of stage or in the crowd, watching them playing in bands, thinking that was the normal thing that happened!" she chuckles. "Like that's the job you do – you go onstage and play for people. There were always basses and guitars in the house, and when I was 11 they got me a short-scale bass and that was it. It just felt right. These days I have an American Standard and two Deluxe J-Basses. I'm using Blackstar amps on stage and a Valeton pedal which literally fits in my handbag!"

Asked about her main influences, she explains: "My dad – he was always playing, and I was always watching in awe of him. When we'd drive anywhere, he'd always play virtuoso jazz players like Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius. That's what I grew up listening

"We'd love to do an arena-sized gig where it feels like we're in a sitting room together, having a laugh"

to. He also used to play bands like the Who and Nirvana, so players that were melodic and virtuosic influenced my playing."

For those who don't know, how would she describe the Lottery Winners? "Someone once said that we were like 'smile music'! We're pretty much straight-up indie-pop, but come and see us live to get what we're about. We've always said we'd love to do an arena-sized gig, but it feels like we're sitting in a living-room together, having a laugh."

Katie's band have recently collaborated with musicians such as Frank Turner, Sleeper, KT Tunstall and the Wonder Stuff – revealing a positive aspect of the current pandemic situation. "In the jazz and pop worlds, everyone does collabs – but it's not really a done thing in the indie world," she reflects. "During lockdown, though, everyone had the time to work on music – so we asked people that we liked to work with us. It was sad that we never got to go into the studio with them as it was all recorded remotely, but I don't think we'd ever have had the opportunity to do that if we hadn't all been at home."

Info: www.thelotterywinners.co.uk

JACK GIBSON, EXODUS

EXIT STRATEGY

Thrash metal pioneers Exodus release their best album in years with *Persona Non Grata*, and bassist Jack Gibson reveals the pain behind the gain (control)...

"I'm pretty happy with our new album, although this time I ran into some physical trouble. We'd been off the road for months, and I hadn't been playing – so when we went into the studio, it had been seven years since I had to learn any riffs from the twisted mind of [songwriter] Gary Holt. I have to say it took me a little bit longer than I wanted to get back on the horse. The picking wasn't quite there. The whole thing wasn't as precise as I know I can be and that I wanted to be. I was like, 'Man, I'm not in the pocket that I want to be in'. Everybody else said 'Oh, it sounds great' but I knew there was this other step up that I could take.

"I do my own engineering, so on this album I brought my rig up, and while they were working on the drums, I rehearsed my stuff, going over it and asking Gary to show me the parts when I was stuck. So by the time I started laying stuff down, I was pretty happy with it. I was finally where I wanted to be. It just took me a minute longer than usual. When I was young, I never even had to warm up. I'd set my beer down, pick up the bass and walk on stage, and everything was cool!"

"When I record I don't use a whole lot of gear. I have a number one bass that I record everything with – a Yamaha BB G5S. When I bought it, it was a violin burst, but they've since painted it black for me. I bought six more of them, so I have two in Europe, two in Oakland with our gear, and two that I can take on tour with me. I leave the number one bass at home now because I don't want to take it out. No matter how many I buy, this one keeps winning the blind taste test. The tones are a little bit different: it's just a little bit hotter, a little stronger. I'm not sure if it's because I broke that one in with my hands, and the other ones were someone else's that I turned into my basses, or not. Maybe I just picked the right one, you know, back in the day, off the shelf from Guitar Center.

"I've been playing Yamahas ever since I got into Exodus. When we recorded, I could just tell that no other basses were going to do what I liked, but it took me some years to get in with them, because they were a tough company to crack back then. There's really not too many metal guys who play Yamaha. It's a lot of jazz guys, so I'm flying the flag for it and showing them that it can be done.

"I played a little bit of acoustic guitar at high school, and I had friends that played guitar, but nobody really played bass apart from this one older guy that we knew, who was really good at bass. He started showing me stuff and actually loaned me his old bass, so I could get started before I could buy my own bass. I ended up going to the Musicians' Institute not too long after that. Steve Bailey was there, and Gary Willis, too. Tim Bogert was a good friend there, because he knew I was a little different than the other guys that were there. I was kind of a rocker, and he understood that and befriended me. That was really cool, because I was playing Anthrax songs at the performances, but really nailing them, not just coming in and making a mess of them."

"When I was younger I never had to warm up. Just set my beer down and walk on stage!"

***Persona Non Grata* is out now.**
Info: https://exodusattack.com

© Miikka Skaffari/FilmMagic

Incoming

Who learned bass in a bomb shelter? Who cites both Carol Kaye and Limp Bizkit as an influence? Meet **Ashley Suppa** from Plush, **Itai Disraeli** of Opium Moon, soloist **Michael Hall** and Harry Jordan's bassist **Kris Hill**, a quartet of talent who are coming your way.

How did you get started on bass?

ASHLEY I started playing bass when I was around 11, but I actually started on guitar because my dad was a guitar player. My bass experience really started when I went to music school and my teacher said, 'Hey, we need a bass player on a song. Do you have a bass at home?' I didn't really know, because I didn't even know what a bass looked like, but I found one at home, as I had musician parents. The song that I learned first on bass was 'Death Or Glory' by the Clash.

ITAI I grew up in Israel on a kibbutz, and when I was 12, there was a war and all the adults joined the army. I snuck into a bomb shelter, picked up a bass and taught myself how to play. My friends and I made a little band, and started playing for the other kids. We only had two amplifiers so we shared them. Our first show for the other kids made everyone go crazy and forget that we were under attack. I learned to move people with music. I was a musician for life.

MICHAEL It's a pretty funny story: in elementary school I started out on the cello as my first serious instrument, which I really loved playing for its rich sound and bottom-end versatility. However, I grew up with pretty bad childhood scoliosis, and had difficulty keeping my back straight for long periods of time. This drove my orchestra teacher crazy, and the moment I got into middle school, I was forced onto the upright bass as a "more comfortable instrument to play". Although she wasn't wrong, I always internalised that as the greatest excuse ever for her not having to endure my poor posture. I continued playing the upright bass all the way through high school, and have been playing the bass guitar ever since.

KRIS I grew up watching my dad play bass in a blues band. I spent hours running around the rehearsal studio and just loved that environment. One summer when I was about 12, I managed to get my hands on this old beat-up acoustic guitar. I started to figure out things that I saw my dad doing on the bass. I was asked to play in a school band when I was 13, and I fell in love with it from there.

> "My friends and I made a little band, and started playing for the other kids. We only had two amplifiers so we shared them."
> Itai

What was your first bass guitar?

ASHLEY I started with a Squier P-Bass, and it was actually an amazing instrument. I realised that this was the bass that I really wanted to play.

ITAI My very first bass was a big cherry red Yamaha SA-70. I loved it so much that I cut up my only blanket to make a case for it. I used to take it to bed with me and fall asleep playing it.

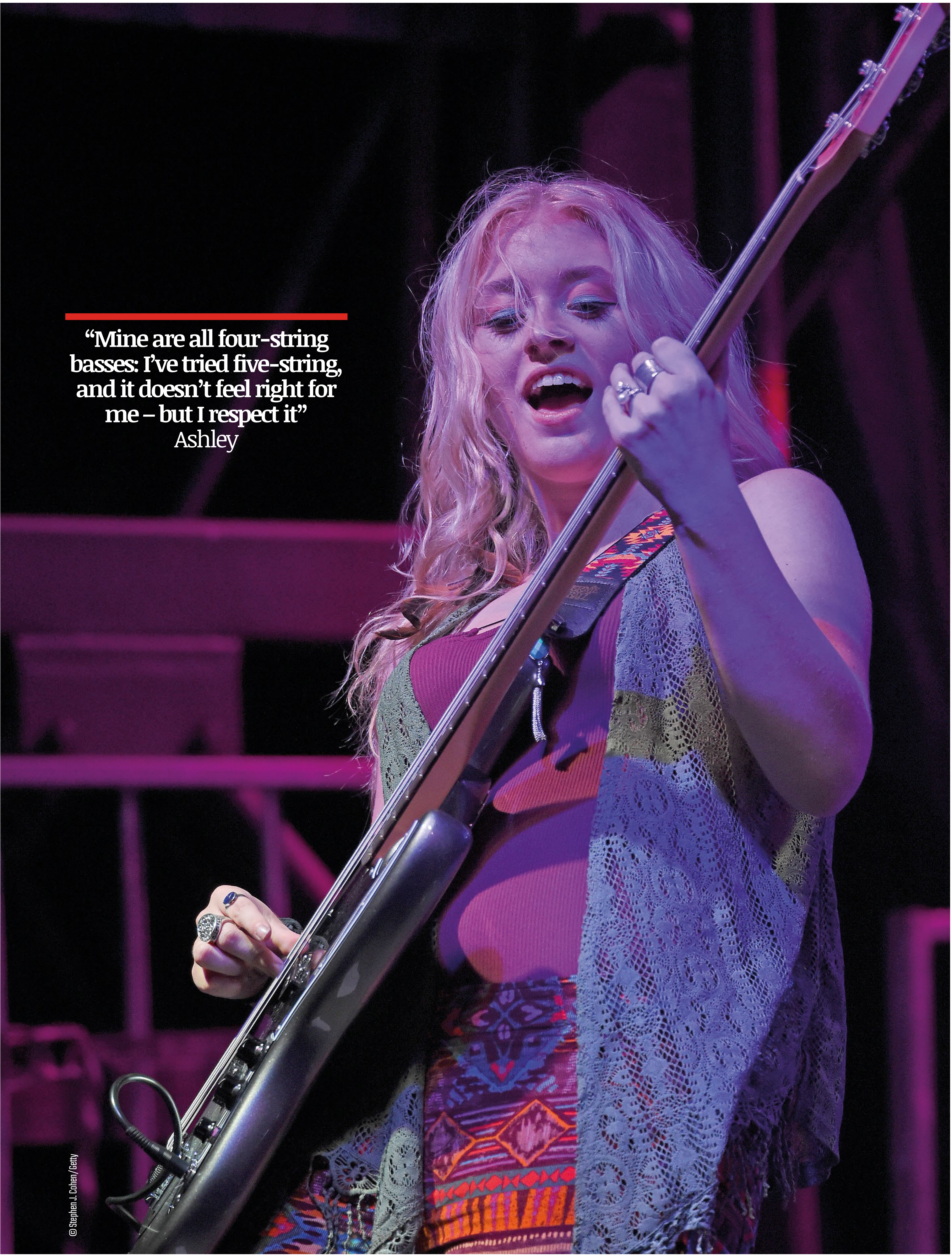
MICHAEL I'm very lucky: my first bass guitar was a Schecter Stargazer, which, looking back, was probably the best bass I could have asked for. The combination of a thin neck and a really great action allowed me to develop quite quickly. Due to the Stargazer's maple neck and lubricated rosewood fingerboard, I was able to learn how to scale across the instrument with relative ease. I was able to build the hand strength that was necessary to hold a variety of different chords, which would have been way more unforgiving on a bass with a wider neck and larger string separation.

KRIS My first bass was a really cheap Stingray copy. It was surprisingly nice to play, but the electronics were just awful. It had a solid alder body and a natural finish, but it was outrageously heavy to carry. The first decent bass I owned was a five-string Ibanez. It had a super-flat fretboard and some powerful active pickups, so it was a dream to play after fighting with that cheap copy for years. Still, I've always felt that learning to play on a crap instrument helps you to appreciate your first worthwhile bass.

What bass gear are you using at the moment?

ASHLEY As my relationship has built with Fender, I now have two Jazz basses and a Precision. Do you know the Jimmy Page Telecasters with the holographic pickguard? I really wanted to get one of those for my P-Bass, because I thought the contrast would be really cool, so I reached out, and they actually sent me one. Live I play in three

Itai: "Every bass player is my brother and sister."



“Mine are all four-string basses: I’ve tried five-string, and it doesn’t feel right for me – but I respect it”
Ashley

© Stephen J. Cohen/ Getty

different tunings, because we have songs in standard, songs in D and then one where I drop it with a Digitech Whammy pedal. Mine are all four-string basses: I've tried five-string, and it doesn't feel right for me, but I respect it. I have a Fender 810 Pro cabinet and a Peavey 1200 head.

ITAI I have a pair of custom-shop Fender Jazz basses, the Jaco model and a 64. I also have a six-string Fodera Imperial Elite, a pair of original Tacoma Thunderchief CB10s, a P-Bass, an old Czech upright and a Moroccan Gimbri. My amps are a Genz-Benz Shuttle, an Ashdown Evo ll and an Eden Traveler. My strings are DR Hi-Beams and I have a special multi-effects rig, the Spaceship, which has an ever-changing cast of effects – Pigtronix, Boss, EBS, Line 6 and many more – that I exchange to create the sonic picture I'm after.

MICHAEL Over the past decade I've mostly played with a Music Man Stingray, primarily for its ability to excel with slap, pop, rock and funk progressions in a full band environment. However, once I found success as a solo bassist, I began to incorporate an Ibanez acoustic bass into my playing for its soft natural tone, and its ability to draw out harmonics. I've also been fortunate enough to work with Pete Skjold of Skjold Design Guitars, and since the end of 2020, I've been using his basses exclusively. So far I've been using two of his five-string Slayer-model basses, along with a four-string Cathedral bass with piccolo bass strings. When it comes to playing live, my gear list has always been pretty limited: I just use a few Boss cables in conjunction with a Polytuner, which is all powered through a Hartke preamp and an Ampeg cab. Whenever I'm performing solo material, the real staple of my gear is my Strymon BigSky Reverb Pedal. It offers a plethora of onboard tonal options for chorus, reverb and delay.

KRIS I'm a big fan of Fender and Squier basses and have a number in my collection, including a Jazz and a short-scale Jaguar that I'm loving at the moment. I'm currently playing a rare 1987 Korean Squier Bullet bass. It's essentially just a standard P-Bass, but the rosewood they used for the neck is beautiful. I've modified it heavily over the years, installing a Graphtech nut, a high-mass bridge, Fender tuners and a set of EMG Geezer Butler passive pickups. They have that really familiar Seventies P-Bass sound, but there's a small boost to the mids to add some grunt. My amp is an Ashdown MAG 300 combo and I'm in love with the Darkglass B3K pedal.

What's the best advice you've been given about playing bass?

ASHLEY Study jazz and classical music and work on different types of genres. Try writing music in other genres, too: I feel like that's the best way to improve. Play something that's out of your comfort zone until you become comfortable with it.

ITAI Calm down and listen. Let your notes last their full value. What you don't play is as important as what you do play. Learn the melody and the lyrics as well as the changes. Know as much as you can about the music. Be completely present and available.

MICHAEL By far the best piece of advice I've ever been given was to always play in the best interests of the music, no matter what. Although that might be simple enough to say, the reality is that it demands an incredible amount of discipline and nuance in your playing, regardless of the situation. Does the song call for me to simply lock in with the downbeat and match the kick drum or hi-hat? Does it call for me to create a counter melody to what the rhythm guitar is playing? As long as you can keep that in mind while you listen to what's happening around you, then the sky's the limit as to how successful you can become as a bassist.

KRIS Serve the song!

> "By far the best piece of advice I've ever been given was to always play in the best interests of the music, no matter what."
> Michael

Kris: "Serve the song!"

Michael: "I'm constantly inspired by Victor Wooten."

Bass has a really privileged position within a band. Every other instrument exists in one world, either melody or rhythm, but as bass players we get to live in both worlds. I've always felt that the best bass players remember to serve both worlds, and only by doing this can we serve the song. Players that only serve the rhythm can be a little boring at times, and players that are only looking to show off with melody forget to give the track the space it needs. We're the glue between the drums and the rest of the band and if we forget that, we're not doing our job.

Which bass player do you most admire?

ASHLEY When I was starting out, I really admired Bootsy Collins, because his playing is amazing. Gail Ann Dorsey from David Bowie's band is just incredible. Paul McCartney, of course. Mike Inez from Alice In Chains, and Rob DeLeo from Stone Temple Pilots. His stage presence is incredible. I've never seen anyone move like that.

ITAI Every bass player is my brother and sister. I have tremendous respect and love for each of us for everything it takes to develop our voice and stay alive and creative in this world. There are so many great players – Jimmy Blanton, Ray Brown, Willie Dixon, Mingus, Jamerson, Bootsy, Jack Bruce, McCartney, Stanley, Jaco, Marcus, Victor, Pino and many others have all influenced and inspire me. I also get inspiration from teaching, and from some of my students, including Thundercat, who I started on bass.

MICHAEL Although there are so many iconic bass players to choose from, I have to go with the one who I genuinely believe is the greatest bassist of all time: Victor Wooten. Not only am I constantly inspired by his otherworldly playing technique, but I've also personally resonated with his general outlook on music ever since I grew into my own as a musician. Victor has spoken at a number of events about the concept of "music as a language", which combats the notion of having to spend years in strict tutelage as the only way to become a "successful" musician.

> **"One of my biggest influences is Sam Rivers from Limp Bizkit. He had so many memorable bass-lines, but also knew when to just sit back and form a solid rhythm section"**
> Kris

KRIS Obviously, I'm blown away by the likes of Geddy Lee, Flea, Victor Wooten and Billy Sheehan. However, I've always been more of a fan of simpler bass players that just create great rhythms and simple melodies. One of my biggest influences growing up was Sam Rivers from Limp Bizkit. He had so many memorable bass-lines, but also knew when to just sit back and form a solid rhythm section.

***ASHLEY** https://ashleysuppa.com*
***ITAI** https://linktr.ee/itaidisraeli*
***MICHAEL** mikehallbass.com*
***KRIS** YouTube: K Bass 12*

WWW.MARLEAUX-BASS.DE

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GEAR Reviews

Welcome to our expert road-tests of state-of-the-art bass gear

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass cabs and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's useful for bassists, but generally speaking, this zone is reserved for bass-specific gear.

We take our reviews seriously. *BP* is the last English-language print magazine devoted solely to bass in the world, and we have readers all over the planet, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your time, we'll say so; if it's flawed, we'll make that clear. We're not answerable to advertisers in any way, and our tests are independent of the views of musicians, manufacturers and distributors.

Let us know what you think of our conclusions. Did we get it right?

Joel McIver, Editor

Reviewed this month...

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SPECTOR NS Pulse II

BARNES & MULLINS
www.bandm.co.uk

Got your finger on the Pulse? Joe Daly asks if this bass improves on its predecessor

Spector's first bass – the NS-1 – made its earthly debut in March 1977 and two years later, the NS-2 arrived. Over the ensuing decades, the classic NS design has withstood any need for enhancement: its sleek, ergonomically-efficient shape has proven immensely popular among players looking to harness the power and versatility of the OG model both on stage and in the studio. From Guy Pratt's addictive bass-line on Madonna's 'Like A Prayer' via Scott Smith's timeless grooves with Loverboy, to Bob Rock's thundering rhythms on Metallica's *St. Anger* album, the NS continues to cast a long shadow across modern music.

In late 2020, Spector introduced the NS Pulse range, which featured two eye-popping, sandblasted designs along with premium electronics. This year they ratchet this model a notch higher with the release of the NS Pulse II – an impressive-looking instrument that seeks to deliver an array of improvements on its predecessor.

£1199

Build Quality

Since the Eighties, Spector has set up international production sites across the globe, with its factories in South Korea handling production of the NS Pulse II. Straight out of the box, the bass strikes an enviable balance between sturdy construction and a light, portable weight. Whereas the original Pulse model showcased this swamp ash body, the Pulse II adds a quilted maple top, along with a three-piece roasted maple bolt-on neck.

The dark, Macassar ebony fretboard commands attention with 24 medium frets, a custom Spector mother-of-pearl inlay on the twelfth fret and illuminating side dots. We receive a five-string for evaluation, which boasts a 35” scale (the four-string is 34”) which is handy when tuning down. Additionally, there’s a locking bridge, smooth black die-cast tuners and a graphite nut.

The electronics vary between the four- and five-string models; the former features an EMG P/J pickup set, while our review model packs a pair of EMG 40DC humbuckers. Running along the bottom contour are two volume knobs and a two-band EQ for bass and treble boost, which drive Spector’s proprietary Tone Pump Jr. preamp.

While the original Pulse models showcased a grainy finish, the Pulse II offers a more elegant look, with a smooth matte finish that’s available in three luxurious colours: Black Cherry, Black Stain and Ultra-Violet.

Sounds and Playability

There’s much to love with the three-dimensionally sculpted contours of the Pulse II. It rests neatly on the lap and proves exceedingly comfortable and well-balanced with a strap. Navigating the neck is as easy as any we’ve played, with its well-spaced frets and an ultra-smooth fingerboard. With the neck joined to the body way down at the 19th fret, there’s easy access all the way through the second octave. As a bolt-on, the neck doesn’t deliver the same degree of sustain as a neck-through, but with an instrument like this, you’re looking for a bit more punch – and that’s precisely what you’ll find.

Spector has attracted a loyal following over the years by consistently offering instruments that balance elegant simplicity with robust versatility

One persisting quibble with the original Pulse model involved the Tone Pump Jr active preamp, with reports that it tended to leak low noise, especially with a bit of treble boost. This is not the case with the Pulse II; played through both Ampeg and Orange amps, the instrument remains noise-free at rest.

The 40DC humbuckers allow us to boldly explore the considerable dynamic range that the five-string delivers, with some glassy, slap-friendly highs and obnoxiously fat lows that punch like a heavyweight.

Playing from the bridge pickup, we go full bore on both volume knobs with the preamp fully cut, and the result is a round tone that approaches P-bass territory. Boosting the bass halfway uncorks a tasty low-end growl – and with the bass fully boosted, our dogs retreat upstairs at the first rumble of furniture.

The midrange serves up a pleasant bite and we're able to conjure a broad spectrum of tones without losing definition. Cutting the bass all the way back and bringing in some treble creates a bright, snappy tone that, while not as sharp as we expected, would cut easily through any mix. From the neck pickup, we coax a warm, jazzy tone with the bass halfway boosted and a dash of treble.

Running through a number of styles, we don't come close to tapping into the full tonal prowess of the Pulse II. Although it proves more than equal to the task with virtually any rock or metal that we play, the Pulse II is by no means a headbanger-only instrument. It has a liquid low end and a spacious dynamic range that any jazz, blues or gospel player would instantly covet. More than anything, the Pulse II is addictively fun to play.

Conclusion

Spector has attracted a loyal following over the years by consistently offering instruments that balance elegant simplicity with robust versatility. In line with those standards, the NS Pulse II is a potent and exceedingly well-crafted instrument that more than justifies its midrange price tag. We recommend it.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1199 (£1144 for four-string)
Made In | South Korea
Body | Swamp ash with quilted maple top
Neck | Three-piece roasted maple, illuminated side dots, graphite nut, 35" scale (34" scale on four-string)
Neck Join | Bolt-on
Fingerboard | Macassar ebony, 24 frets
Pickups | 2 x active EMG 40DC humbuckers (P/J pickups on four-string)
Electronics | Spector TonePump Jr preamp
Hardware | Locking bridge, die-cast tuners
Weight | 9.7 lbs / 4.4 kg
Left-hand available? No
Case/gigbag included? No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Sturdy construction, powerful pickups
Minus | Two-channel preamp requires more precision than a three-band EQ
Overal | A joy to play and packs a wallop

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★★

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆

VALUE
★★★★★★★★★☆

CORT Artisan B5 Element

It's Elementary, says **Mike Brooks** of this beefed-up B5

440 DISTRIBUTION
www.440distribution.com

£549

The new B5 Element from Cort draws on the most popular features of the brand's Artisan range, adding into the mix a Bartolini electronics package, Hipshot and MetalCraft hardware and a roasted maple fingerboard. Given its affordable price, you get a lot of bang for your buck. Is the sum of the parts worthy of your attention? Let's find out.

Build Quality

The rounded body curves, deep lower cutaway and contouring to the rear of the body make this a very comfortable bass to wear, despite its 9.3-pound weight. Some noticeable headstock bias is solved when you play it on a strap. The five-piece walnut and panga panga laminate neck is connected to the body courtesy of a four-bolt attachment: the neck pocket appears solid and robust, however, there are two small gaps around the pocket where the neck doesn't sit completely flush against the body.

I found the rounded neck profile a little clubby, although the bulky feel is offset by the almost flat radius of the roasted maple fingerboard and as a whole, the neck feels substantial and well-finished, with no sharp fret ends. The warm shades of the neck and fingerboard timbers contrast markedly with the ash body top, but are very much in keeping with the mahogany core.

Black hardware reinforces the look of this instrument, with Hipshot Ultralite machine heads and a MetalCraft M5 bridge that facilitates both

bartolini
bartolini

through-body and toploaded stringing. Abalone position markers adorn the front fingerboard facing, while white dots have been used along the side of the neck. The bass comes with a full Bartolini MK-1 package, comprising a pair of soapbar pickups: a three-band EQ circuit offers cut and boost across their respective frequencies, and there's also an active/passive selector.

Sounds and Playability

From the moment you pick up the B5 Element, its forthright character is very apparent and no matter which playing style you wish to employ, a throaty midrange punch is noticeable. The bass has a pleasing 'bounce' in its core tone, and played acoustically, the B5 projects notes from every string, across the whole neck, with an energetic spring.

If you want the EQ to dampen down some of this natural liveliness, you'll be disappointed: the woody punch is with you from the moment you plug the bass in, particularly across the low-mid frequencies. Some players will be happy to hear this, of course, while others may not: it depends on how you want to put those lively tones to use. If you want an old-school rounded tone, pan across to the neck pickup, where the EQ will allow you to replace some of the punch with boosted bass frequencies; however, the gritty tone is still there. Slap, tap and pick players may find that this punchy quality helps to raise the signal over a band mix, giving the bass more character and projection.

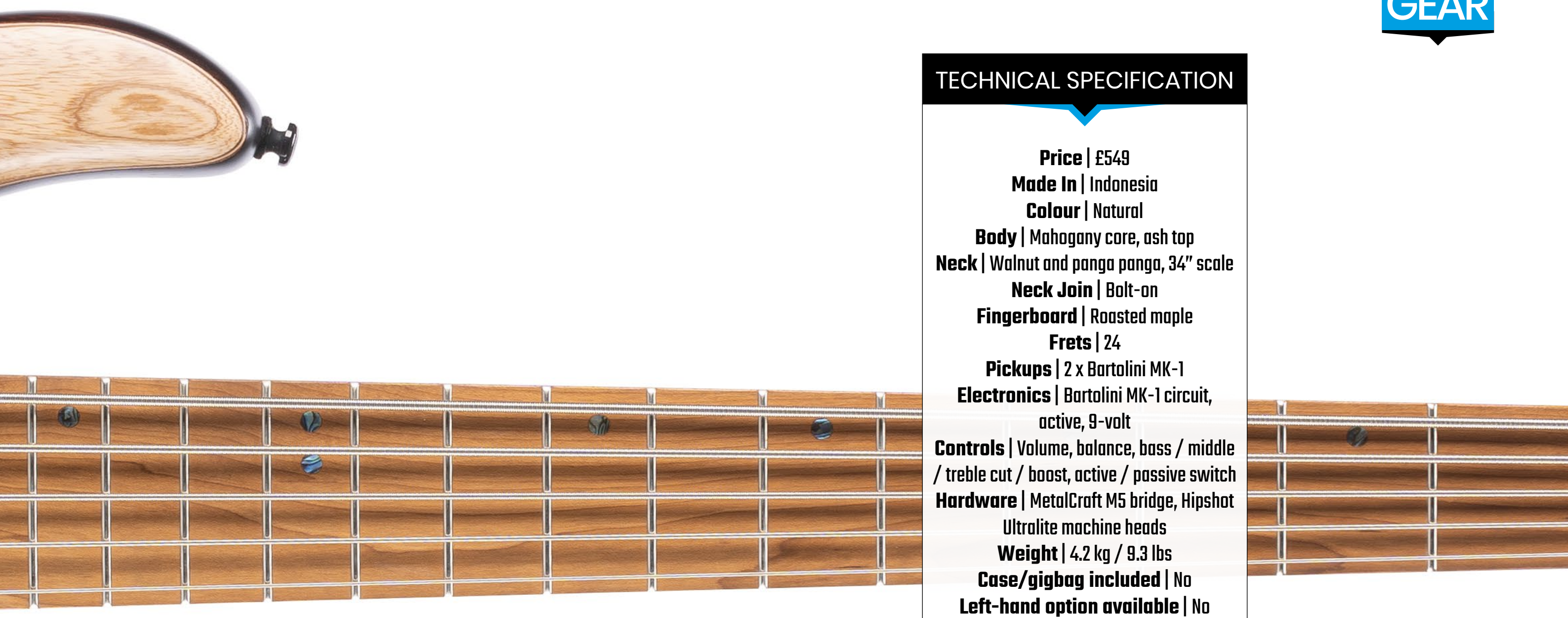
Having said all that, this bass has plenty of tonal power on tap, and the extensive EQ gives the player an impressive palette of tones from which to choose. The bass EQ is robust and full, while the treble performance is clear, delivering a considerable amount of finesse to your signal. The midrange is where you need to focus your attention, and without a mid-sweep control to select a frequency to modulate, any boosting will accentuate the punchy qualities of this bass.

The B5 Element is a pleasure to handle: Cort should be congratulated

In terms of playability, the B5 Element is a pleasure to handle: Cort should be congratulated for taking the best qualities of their other basses and adding them to this model. The neck is very rewarding to play, aided by an 18mm string spacing and although the bass doesn't feature a 35" scale length, the low B string performs impressively alongside the other strings, giving a consistent tonal performance across the whole neck.

Conclusion

This is a solid performer in every respect, with a core tone that will work for a lot of players. At this price, there is very little to complain about. The B5 Element puts other, more expensive instruments to shame, so if you're looking for an affordable five-string, we recommend it.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £549
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Natural
Body | Mahogany core, ash top
Neck | Walnut and panga panga, 34" scale
Neck Join | Bolt-on
Fingerboard | Roasted maple
Frets | 24
Pickups | 2 x Bartolini MK-1
Electronics | Bartolini MK-1 circuit, active, 9-volt
Controls | Volume, balance, bass / middle / treble cut / boost, active / passive switch
Hardware | MetalCraft M5 bridge, Hipshot Ultralite machine heads
Weight | 4.2 kg / 9.3 lbs
Case/gigbag included | No
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Great specs and tones, pocket-friendly price
Minus | Midrange tones won't suit everyone
Overall | A versatile five-string that covers a lot of ground

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE
★★★★★★★★★☆

AGUILAR DB599 Bass Compressor

Tame those transients today, advises Mike Brooks

BARNES & MULLINS
www.bandm.co.uk

£220

Hot on the heels of Aguilar's DB925 Bass Preamp comes the DB599 Bass Compressor, following the same micro format and occupying a reduced footprint on your pedalboard compared to standard pedal dimensions. Many of you will be familiar with Aguilar's previous foray into compression, the TLC Compressor, which presented the player with four controls with which to sculpt and tailor their bass signal. The DB599 simplifies the process somewhat by offering Compression and Gain controls, while utilising pre-selected compression ratios and attack/release parameters. In theory this should make the player's job simpler, with only two controls to contend with.

The pedal's rugged metal chassis should certainly withstand life on the road, and the controls themselves are solidly fitted and turn smoothly, as you would expect of an Aguilar product. The stomp switch is equally solid and operates without any obvious issues. With input/output connections located on the sides of the chassis and the adaptor connection at the top of the pedal, the DB599 shouldn't pose any problems when fitted onto a pedalboard.

In operation, and with no compression applied, the Gain control can be adjusted so that the pedal acts as a volume control, should you need a signal boost. As with all Aguilar products, the company creates them to be 'musical' rather than offering parameter extremes – and this philosophy is highlighted here. With the Gain control turned down, increasing the Compression control results in a volume reduction; increasing the Gain control brings the volume back to the level you require, but with a smoother signal and fewer transients. With a little experimentation, it will become apparent that small adjustments are best when you're exploring this pedal's sonic nuances. Scanning the QR code on the box will display the parameters for a variety of settings.

As with any compression effect, your instrument, playing style, string freshness, technique and attack will affect how it reacts. For that reason, any settings that work at home, in rehearsal or in a recording context may change significantly if you decide to call the DB599 into action in a live performance – so be prepared to make adjustments on the fly. This is where this pedal comes into its own, due to its simplicity. I would prefer more control and interaction over the presets, but on the flipside, there is less likelihood of becoming confused with the settings – and you can get on with your playing.

I found the DB599 intuitive and simple to operate, and overall, its simplicity is a major selling point. I used it to smooth out fingerstyle passages with considerable peaks, slap sections that varied in volume, and to provide a more resonant, percussive-sounding thump or for tighter articulation when using a pick. In all instances, I found the DB599 delivered the goods.

As Aguilar's full-sized studio-quality TLC compressor is also available, I suggest that the DB599 be treated as a more 'plug and play' option that doesn't require constant tweaking to find the desired effect, and which also takes up minimal space on a pedalboard. If you're willing to pay for a suitable solution to those two requirements, look no further.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £220
Made In | USA
Features | Compression, gain
Dimensions | 3.66" x 1.77" x 1.96" / 93 x 45 x 50mm
Power | 9 volt DC

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Simple, effective
Minus | Not cheap; limited controls restrict its flexibility
Overall | A well-sized, sensibly designed and musical compressor

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★☆☆
VALUE
★★★★★★★★☆☆

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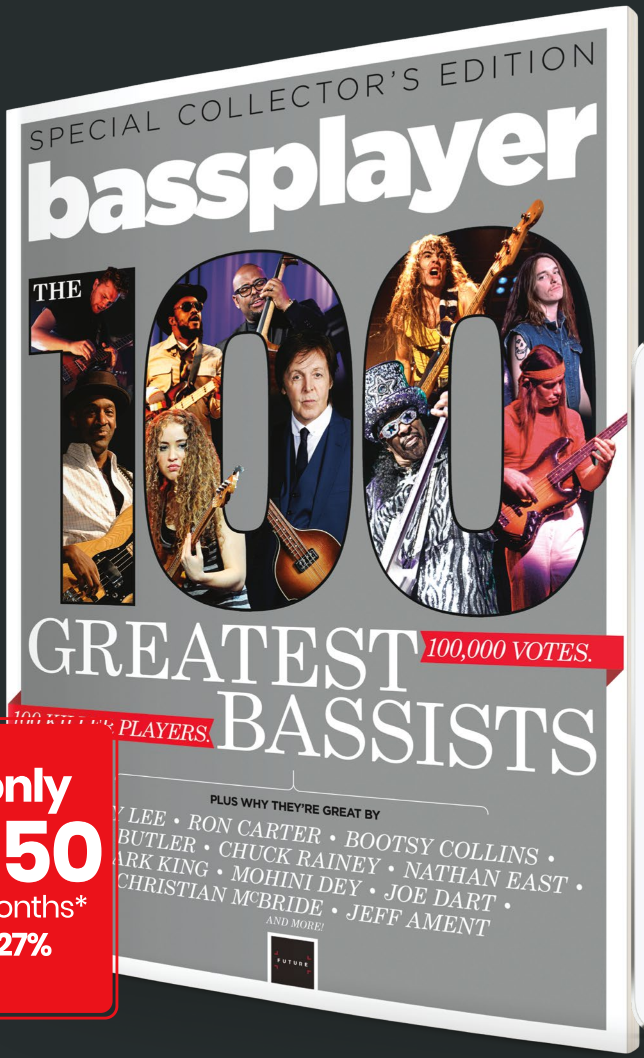

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Bass Lessons

Making you a better bass player in every issue, our state-of-the-art team of educators will guide you every step of the way. Say hello to them here!

I SPY... 62

RYAN MADORA

Dig into your favourite bass parts... and discover treasure!
Ryan Madora is one of Nashville's most sought-after touring and session bassists. Recent touring and session credits include Robben Ford, Kyshona Armstrong, and her instrumental trio, The Interludes. For the past five years, she has served as musical director for Bobby Bones and has played with Garth Brooks, Darius Rucker, and Carrie Underwood. In addition to instructing at Nashville's campus of Musician's Institute, Ryan has taught at Gerald Veasley's Bass Boot Camp, Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp, and at universities across the USA. She has contributed columns to No Treble for over a decade and in 2019, published her first book, *Bass Players To Know: Learning From The Greats*. Ryan offers online education at TrueFire and her website.
www.ryanmadora.com
Facebook ryanmadoramusic
Twitter RyanMadora
Instagram ryanmadora

BEGINNER 64

STEVE LAWSON

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across more than two decades of touring, and a huge catalogue of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for almost three decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?
www.stevelawson.net
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INTERMEDIATE 70

PHILIP MANN

Now you're rolling, it's time to hit the next level
Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Eich, he's a busy, internationally freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with Grammy Award-winning artists Van Morrison and Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Leo Sayer, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Donegan. Author of the *Chord Tone Concepts* texts, Philip is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while simultaneously lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.
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Instagram with_bass_in_mind

ADVANCED 76

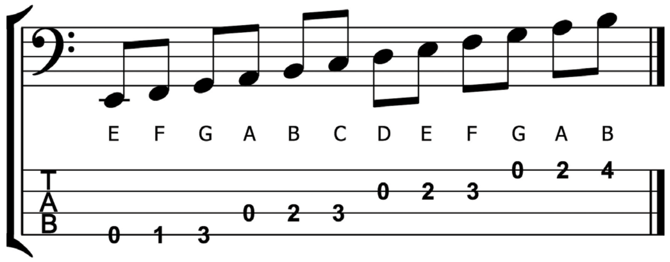
RICH BROWN

Maximise your bass skills with our advanced studies
Toronto-born electric bassist Rich Brown has established himself as an incredibly versatile artist. Along with being one of the most called-upon electric bass players in Canada, Rich is a composer, producer, bandleader, educator and clinician, broadcaster, and voiceover artist. He has recorded three albums as a leader, including his critically acclaimed album of solo bass compositions *Between Heaviness & Here*.
Rich appears on a plethora of recordings, ranging from jazz to traditional Arabic and Asian music. He has performed with a wide variety of artists, including Rudresh Mahanthappa, Vijay Iyer, Steve Coleman and Angelique Kidjo. Rich leads two groups – rinsethealgorithm and The Abeng – and was nominated for a Juno Award in 2016 for his latest album, *Abeng*.
fbass.com/artists/rich-brown
Instagram richbrownbass
Youtube Brown'stone With Rich Brown

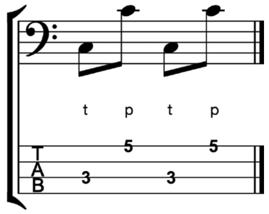
BP Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

The Stave: Most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.
Tablature: This is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

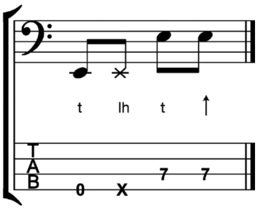


PLAYING TECHNIQUES



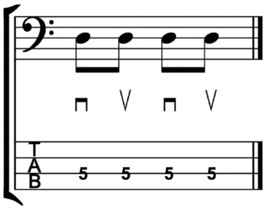
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a ‘t’, notes popped with the fingers marked with a ‘p’.



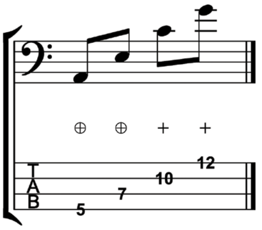
ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked ‘lh’ and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow.



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

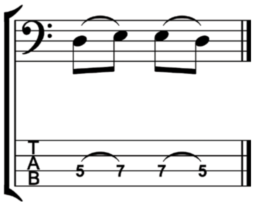
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up).



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

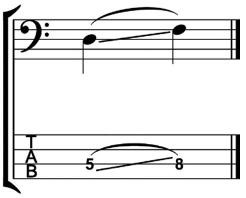
Fretting hand taps have a ‘+’ in a circle. Picking hand taps are just ‘+’. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



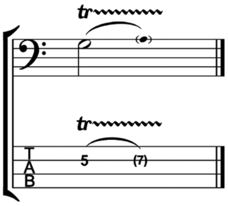
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

These are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand.



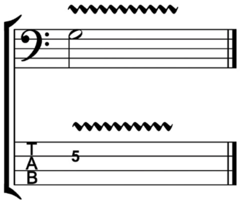
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note and then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note.



TRILLS

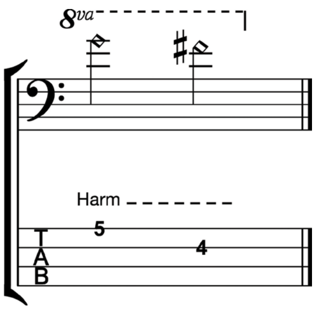
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.



VIBRATO

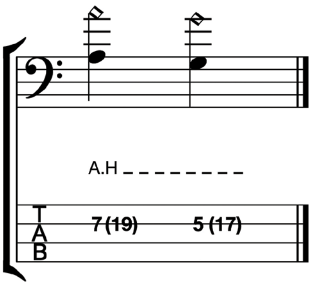
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

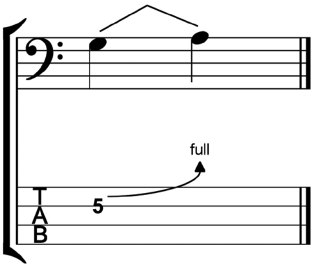
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

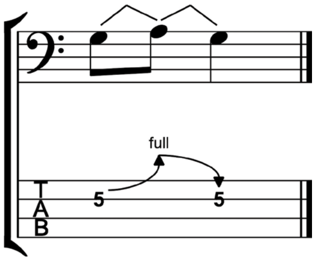
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ indicates a semitone, ‘full’ indicates a tone.



BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated and then released back to its original pitch.

Ryan Madora

I SPY...

THE BLUES BOX

In session and stage bassist Ryan Madora's amazing column, we discover a stack of useful secrets hidden inside our favourite bass-lines

Hey there, bass players! We've been exploring the world of rhythm for some time now and, while that concept is far from exhausted, I figured we were ready for a change of pace – perhaps something a bit more fun, and certainly very funky.

Let's shift our focus to patterns, an element of music that bass players get to rely upon quite a bit. Thanks to our instrument being tuned in fourths, we have the luxury of a delightfully symmetrical fretboard. Since the relationship between the strings is the same across the board, it's relatively easy to think in visual representations: frets, fingerings, patterns and shapes. The barrier to entry is quite low and you can learn how to play a few grooves just by practising patterns – and, while learning note names and understanding theory is absolutely critical to becoming a good musician, plenty of players get by with this pictorial perspective. Rather than relying solely on shapes, let's bridge the gap between pattern and theory.

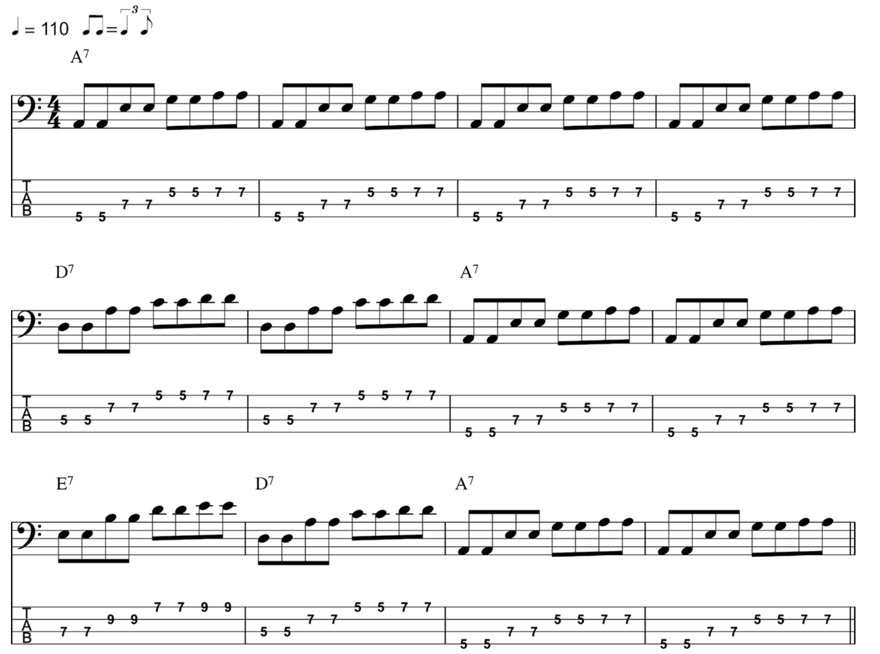
> **The blues box refers to a specific set of intervals: the root, fifth, flat seventh and octave**

As I think back on some of my favourite grooves, there's a common pattern that pops up on records of all genres: classic blues, Eighties rock, Top 40, you name it! This shape is affectionately referred to as the 'blues box'. I skimmed the surface of this pattern during our discussion of swung eighth notes, but it's now time for a deep dive.

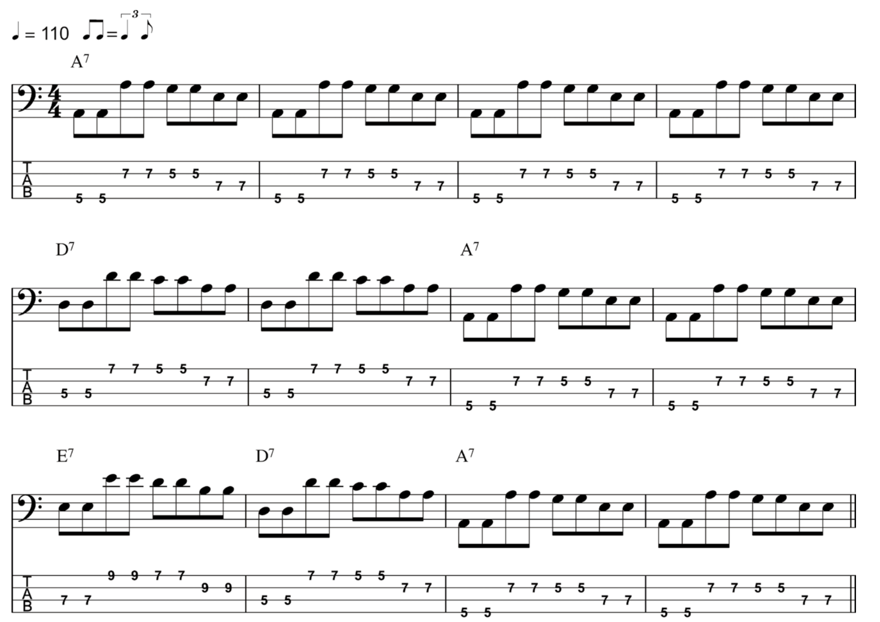
The blues box refers to a specific set of intervals: the root, fifth, flat seventh, and octave. Whether we play them ascending or descending, these notes will create the shape of a box on the fretboard, spanning three strings and three frets.

Let's practise this box pattern in **Exercise 1a.** We'll play through a 12-bar blues in the

EXERCISE ONE A



EXERCISE ONE B



key of A and use swung eighth notes to establish the shuffle feel. Begin on A at the 5th fret of the E string, play the fifth of the chord (E) on the 7th fret of the A string, and then play the flat seventh (G) and octave (A) on the 5th and 7th frets of the D string. You'll see that this creates the shape of a box on the fretboard. Following the blues form, move this pattern to the IV chord, beginning on D, and the V chord, beginning on E.

From a technical standpoint, I recommend playing this pattern with just two fingers: the index finger for the root and flat seventh (5th fret) and the pinky for the fifth and octave (7th fret). While this may not adhere to the conventional four-fret span, this positioning will keep your hand aligned with the fretboard and may prove to be less stressful on your muscles.

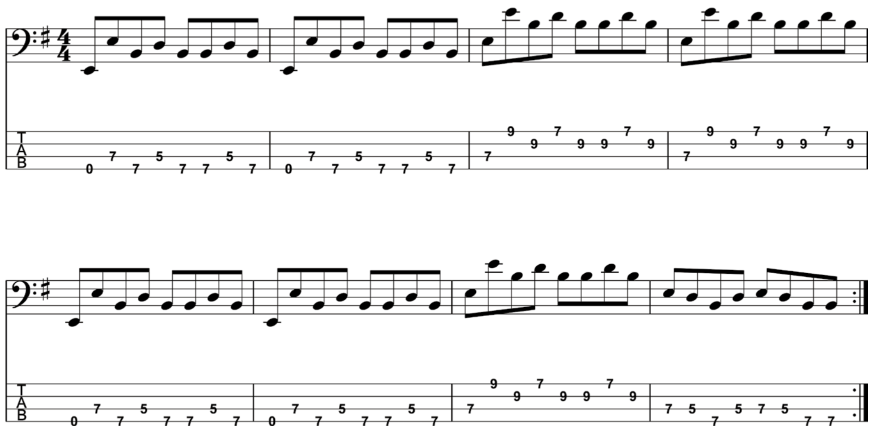
In **Exercise 1b,** we're going to take the same group of notes, but flip the pattern. This time, begin on the root note, jump up to the octave (7th fret of the D string) and then descend to the flat seventh and fifth scale degrees. Both versions of this pattern should sound very familiar and quintessential to the blues genre. You can spy this on the Freddie King classic 'I'm Tore Down', among many other standards.

Now that we've worked this into our repertoire, let's break down the theory of it and try to apply it to other genres. You may notice that these notes would normally spell out an arpeggio, but there's one omission: the third. The absence of the third means that we're not clearly indicating major or minor. Lo and behold, this pattern enjoys a bit of harmonic ambiguity. It can be used over a dominant chord (A7) or a minor seventh chord (Am7). Coincidentally, these notes also exist within the minor pentatonic scale and the blues scale. How convenient!

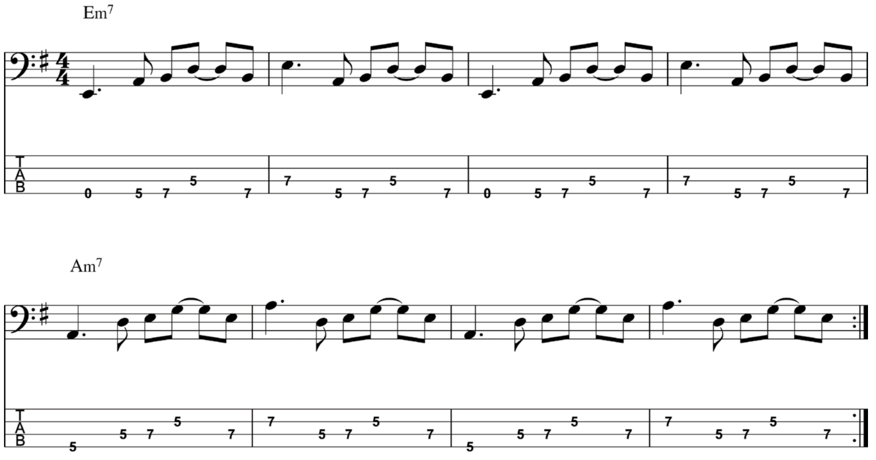
As with any group of notes, such as a scale or an arpeggio, we can be flexible with order and register. Rearranging the notes of the box pattern will help us create countless bass-lines, especially as we get creative with rhythm. To gain some mental and physical flexibility in that area, let's play through a few variations.

In **Exercise 2,** we'll move to the key of E minor and practise playing with the box pattern over two registers, starting with our open E string or the 5th fret of your B string. For the first two bars, play an Eighties rock-inspired pattern using notes in the blues box. Then, mimic the pattern an octave higher in bars 3 and 4. In the second line of the exercise, bars 5 to 7 will repeat and the final bar will include yet another variation. This pattern should sound somewhat familiar and may remind you of Bon Jovi's

EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE



Try making your own grooves by rearranging the notes and improvising with rhythm

'Livin' On A Prayer'. Try rearranging a few of these notes and you'll be able to match the bass-line used in the verse.

While you're practising these patterns, you may realise that another note lives perfectly under your index finger: the fourth scale degree. While this note isn't part of the arpeggio, it's an easy and consonant addition to the blues box. It works especially well in the context of minor grooves or anything involving the minor pentatonic or blues scale.

In **Exercise 3,** we'll create another groove by adding the fourth scale degree to our blues box. Using the root, fourth, fifth, flat seventh, and octave, play the pattern twice over Em7 – equalling a four-bar phrase – and twice over Am7. This may transport you to other familiar grooves, particularly those in the soul, R&B or pop/rock vein. Without doing too much rearranging, you'll be able to play the bass-line to Sheryl Crow's 'All I Wanna Do'.

Once you've played through these examples, try making your own grooves by rearranging the notes and improvising with rhythm. You may even draw inspiration from other blues box bass-lines. I assure you that before long, you'll have a full repertoire of grooves that take advantage of this shape. Enjoy playing these patterns and see you next month!

Beginners Lesson

START HERE!

CREATE PENTATONIC HOOKS

The great Steve Lawson brings us a new approach to studying bass at beginner level. The journey begins...

Welcome back! Let's take a deeper look at some of the rhythmic variations we can bring to our pentatonic-based and soulful bass-lines. Often, creating a memorable line is just a matter of moving one or two notes into a less obvious place in the bar to create a hook. Think about the bass-line in the verse from 'Knock On Wood' by Eddie Floyd. On each chord, it's just a major triad with the sixth added, but it's the rhythm that gives it its distinct character – the way the notes are moved off the beat. We call that shifting of notes off the beat 'displacement'.

This month we're going to look at a number of possible ways to displace the notes in our pentatonic lines: this will help us come up with simple hooks when writing or improvising. Let's start with the first four notes of an E minor pentatonic pattern. Exercise 1 shows them all as quarter notes.

EXERCISE ONE

Play this and repeat it. Quarter notes have a nice walking feel, but are tough to turn into a hook that people associate with the song – so let's see what happens as we move each note off the beat in turn. We'll start with beat 2, just so we still have the root note on the downbeat.

Displacing the notes in our pentatonic lines will help us to come up with simple hooks when writing or improvising

EXERCISE TWO

As you can see in the notation for Exercise 2, the first note has a dot after it. This adds half as long again to the note length, so what was a quarter note is now a quarter note plus an eighth note. This means that the second beat is delayed and now happens an eighth note later than in the first exercise. The other three beats are where they were before.

If you're counting this using '1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &' to hear the subdivisions, the second note is now on the 'and' of 2. To write this out, we can capitalise each count that has a note played on it as 'ONE and two AND THREE and FOUR and', which makes it obvious what happens when we take the note that was on beat two and play it an eighth note later. As always, copying it into some notation software or finding a friend who can read it for you will help you to start to associate visual patterns with the musical elements they represent.

Let's do that again, but for Exercise 3 move the note on beat three to the 'and' of three.

EXERCISE THREE

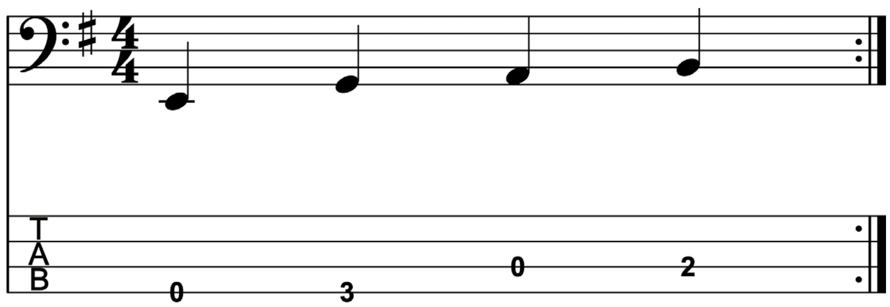
This time the count is 'ONE and TWO and three AND FOUR and'. Play the pattern round a few times, and then alternate it with a line of your own that uses the same notes but mixes up the rhythm or the order, or both.

It's really good practice to take written exercises and improvise around them, first playing the exercise and then a line that it inspires you to play. This way we get to the heart of the music underneath the technical aspects in a more fully realised way – and as we so often say in this column, we get to think about whether or not what we're playing actually sounds good, not just whether we've got the exercise right.

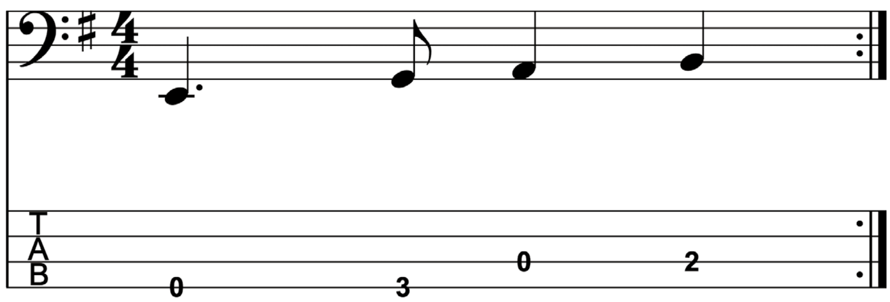
EXERCISE FOUR

Exercise 4 is what happens when we displace the fourth note. We put the 'dotted quarter note' on beat three, and this pushes the fourth note back to the eighth note before

EXERCISE ONE



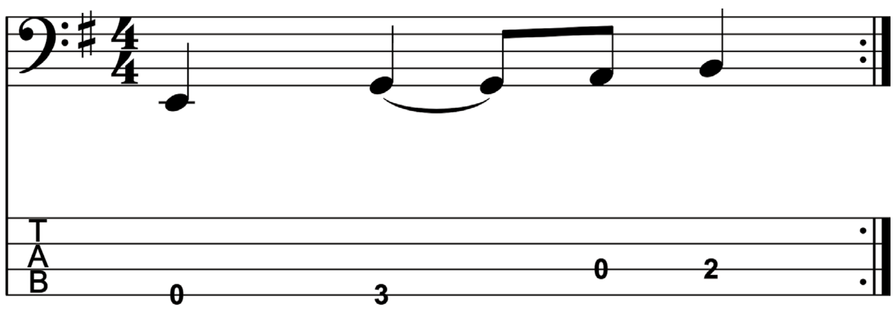
EXERCISE TWO



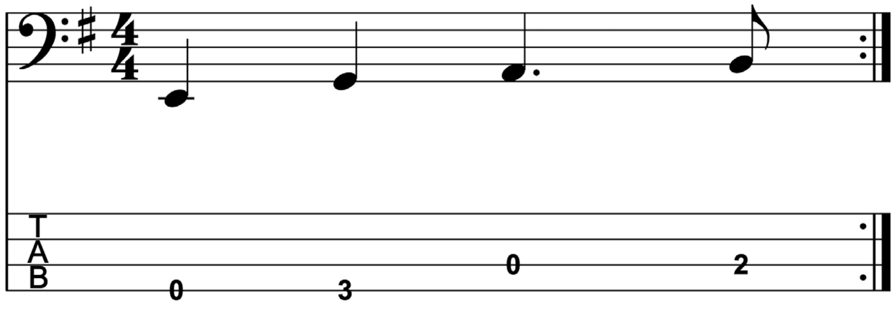
Donald 'Duck' Dunn of The MGs, pictured here way back in 1967

© Don Paulsen/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty

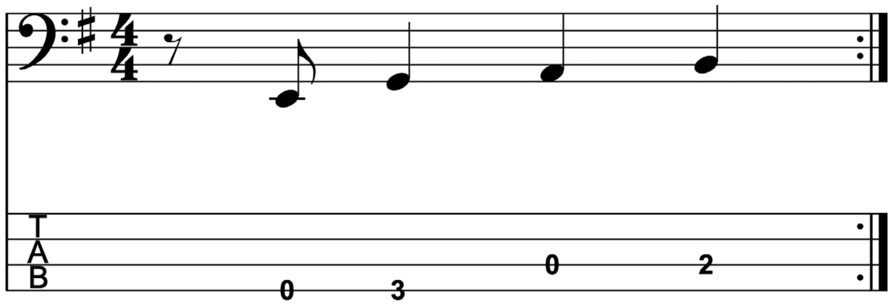
EXERCISE THREE



EXERCISE FOUR



EXERCISE FIVE



we play beat one again as we loop round this one-bar phrase.

This kind of pick-up note, played before coming back to the start of a phrase, can be really effective in a line, and is often echoed in drum parts, especially with slightly longer phrases of two or four bars in length. Drummers will often use fills, extra kick drums, cymbals or just an open hi-hat to help break the music up into two, four, eight and sixteen bar sections.

Getting used to listening out for those adjustments to the main drum groove can help us develop lines that lock into those variations, but they can also be super-useful if you're slightly unsure of the structure of the piece you're playing. Listen out for the drum fills that anticipate the section changes: this will take the pressure off you when it comes to counting bars. After all, let's face it, there are few things that are less appealing to do on stage than count bars. Finding other ways to get the structure of the songs locked in is deeply preferable to trying to remember if this is bar 30 or 31 of the guitar solo!

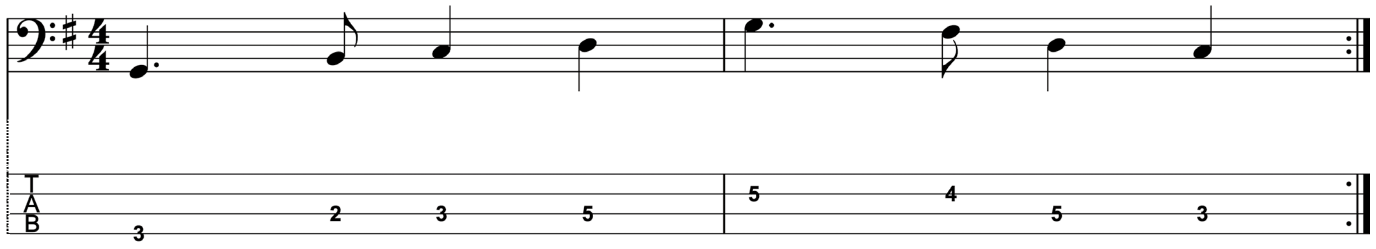
EXERCISE FIVE

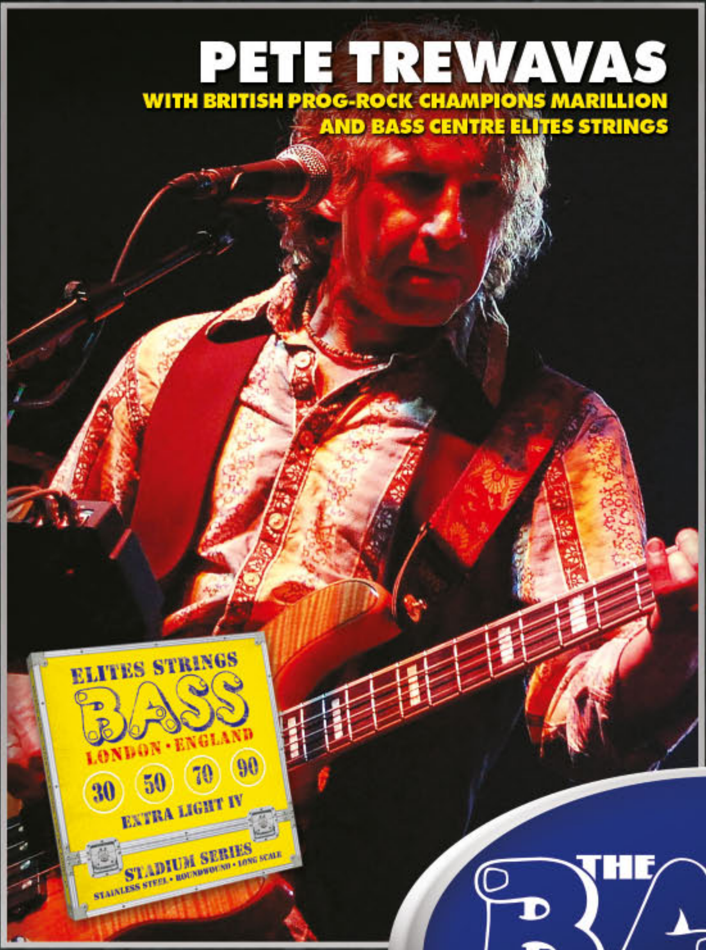
Let's finish off this first section by displacing beat one. This can be an effective variation to add in to a line, especially if you work it out with your drummer and she moves the kick away from beat one too.

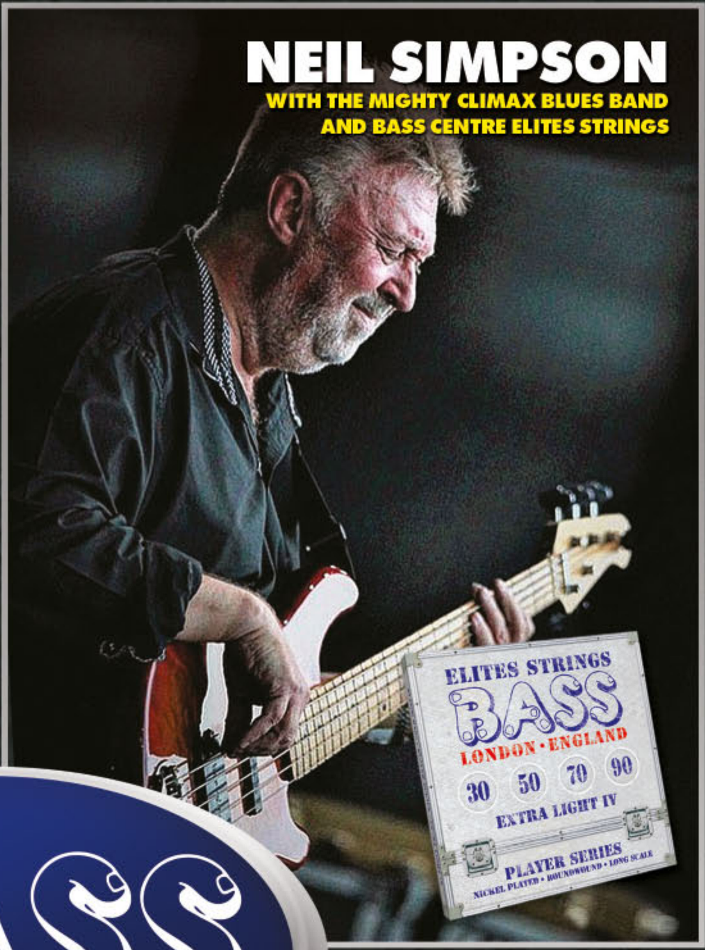
Exercise 5 follows the same pattern as before, but with beat one displaced. Note that instead of beat four having a dot after it to extend it, the 'quarter note plus an eighth note' length is now the combination of the quarter note on beat four and the eighth note rest on beat one – so the line starts on the 'and' after beat one.

Before we look at some ways to extend this exercise, it's worth taking a moment to think about the process we've just gone through, and how it fits with our 'parameter and permutation' approach to developing any exercise. We've taken one very simple idea

EXERCISE SIX







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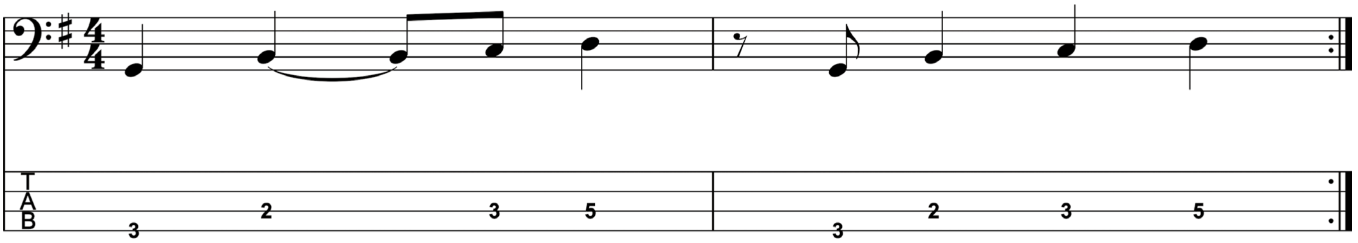
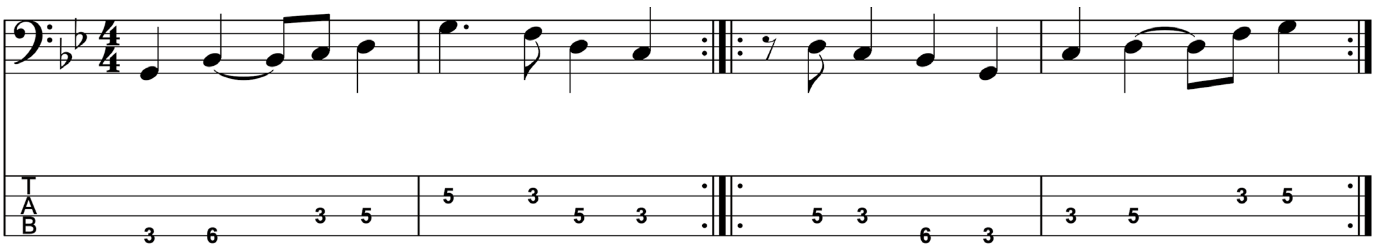
EXERCISE SEVEN



EXERCISE EIGHT



– displacing a single beat in a bar of quarter notes – and we've worked it through our phrase. We didn't just do it on one beat and assume that the others would come to us in the moment. We actually built a separate exercise for each version, and looped it round to get a feel for it.

It's really important that you take the time to play through as many variations of any exercise as you can, and work on getting the feel right, and on getting comfortable with any technical challenges that may arise. As we change the note sequence over which we might try these phrases, we may find that string crossing is harder in some parts of the line than others. Always slow it down when things get tricky, and focus on making it as smooth and economical as possible in terms of your hand movements. Try to stay relaxed and if your hands ever start to hurt, stop!

Okay, let's turn these into two-bar phrases, and come down from the octave for the second bar. For this, we're going to move it to a G minor chord and use a G minor pentatonic. E minor gives us a whole slew of possible open strings, and is a really fun key to experiment with for that reason, but it's always important to move exercises around the neck and experience what they feel like when there aren't any open strings to lean on.

EXERCISE SIX

Exercise 6 is the rhythm from Exercise 2 doubled, with the second bar coming back down the pentatonic from octave.

When we repeat a rhythm across different parts of a line like that, it reinforces its impact on the track. We now have a one-bar rhythmic hook with a two-bar melodic bass-line, so we've doubled the length of the riff while using the same rhythm for both. Changing one aspect while keeping another the same is a great way to mix things up without having to write whole other sections to the song.

The more time we spend on the subtle variations like these, the easier we'll find it to recall those same patterns when writing or jamming

For example, we could pair up any two of the one-bar phrases in Exercises 2 to 5 to give us the same four-note sequence, but with the displaced note in different parts of the bar. Let's displace beat three and beat one and see what happens to our line in Exercise 7.

EXERCISE SEVEN

If you want to hear a very similar rhythmic device used in a song, have a look at the iconic bass hook of 'Bad' by Michael Jackson, which does this very thing. The line is repeated twice and in the second bar beat one is pushed an eighth-note late. The notes in the riff from 'Bad' are a minor pentatonic with a chromatic note between the fourth and fifth – ideas that we've looked at in this very column.

The important thing to realise is that the path to being catchy is rarely about complexity. More often than not, it's about finding a new way to represent familiar note combinations that stick in people's heads.

EXERCISE EIGHT

Let's finish up with two versions of a line that uses the up and down sequence from Exercise 6 but changes the rhythm between the two bars. Exercise 8 gives us a template for practising as many combinations as we can of the four one-bar rhythmic variations. The first two bars of this final exercise are just that, and the last two bars invert the two sequences of four notes, so instead of starting on the root in each bar, we end on it. See how many variations you can come up with.

There are so many great lines to be found in the simplest of sequences, and the more time we spend on subtle variations like this, the easier we'll find it to recall those same patterns when writing with friends, joining in on a jam session or trying to work out similar patterns when we hear them on tracks we're learning. Have fun, and I'll see you next month!

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NEXT STEPS

MASTER CHORD CHANGES

Phil Mann is a stage and session star and educator extraordinaire. Get ready to step up your bass game!

In my mind there is a massive difference between academic learning and practical application. You can sit and study as many scales as you like, but that doesn't mean you can make music from them.

This is a problem that faces many developing bass players. More often than not, we find ourselves taught how to physically produce a scale rather than how to apply it.

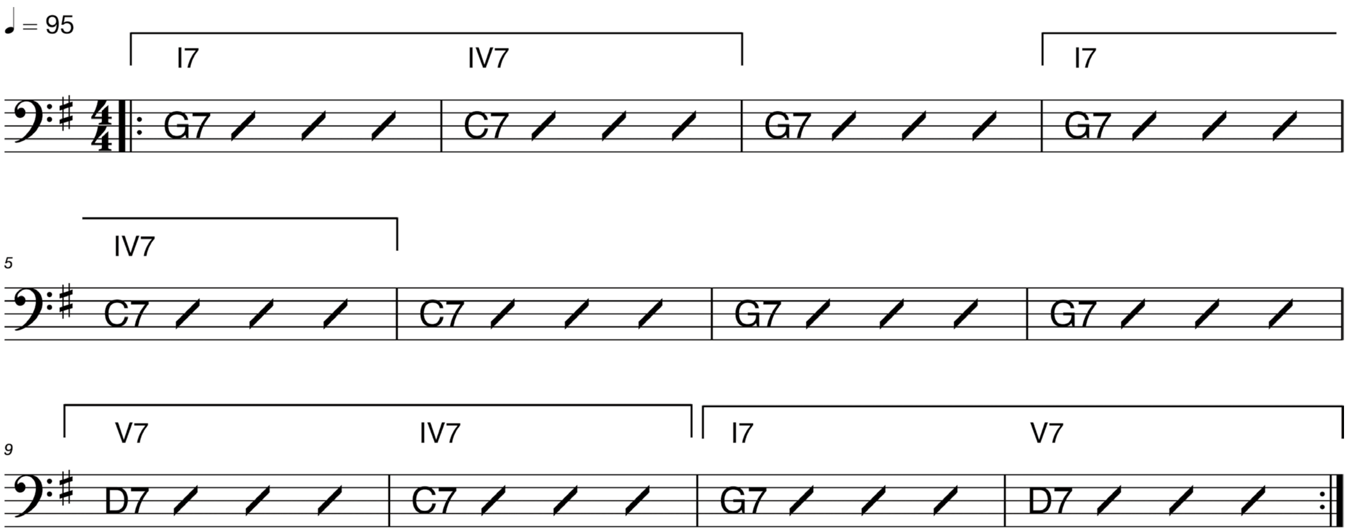
Over the last few instalments of this page, we've been analysing the construction of I7-IV7-V7 chord progressions, examining the relationships that exist within them and the melodic tools you need to interpret those changes – but most importantly, we've been investigating what to play and why to play it.

Let's keep going with that approach!

Georgia South of Nova Twins kicks up a bass storm

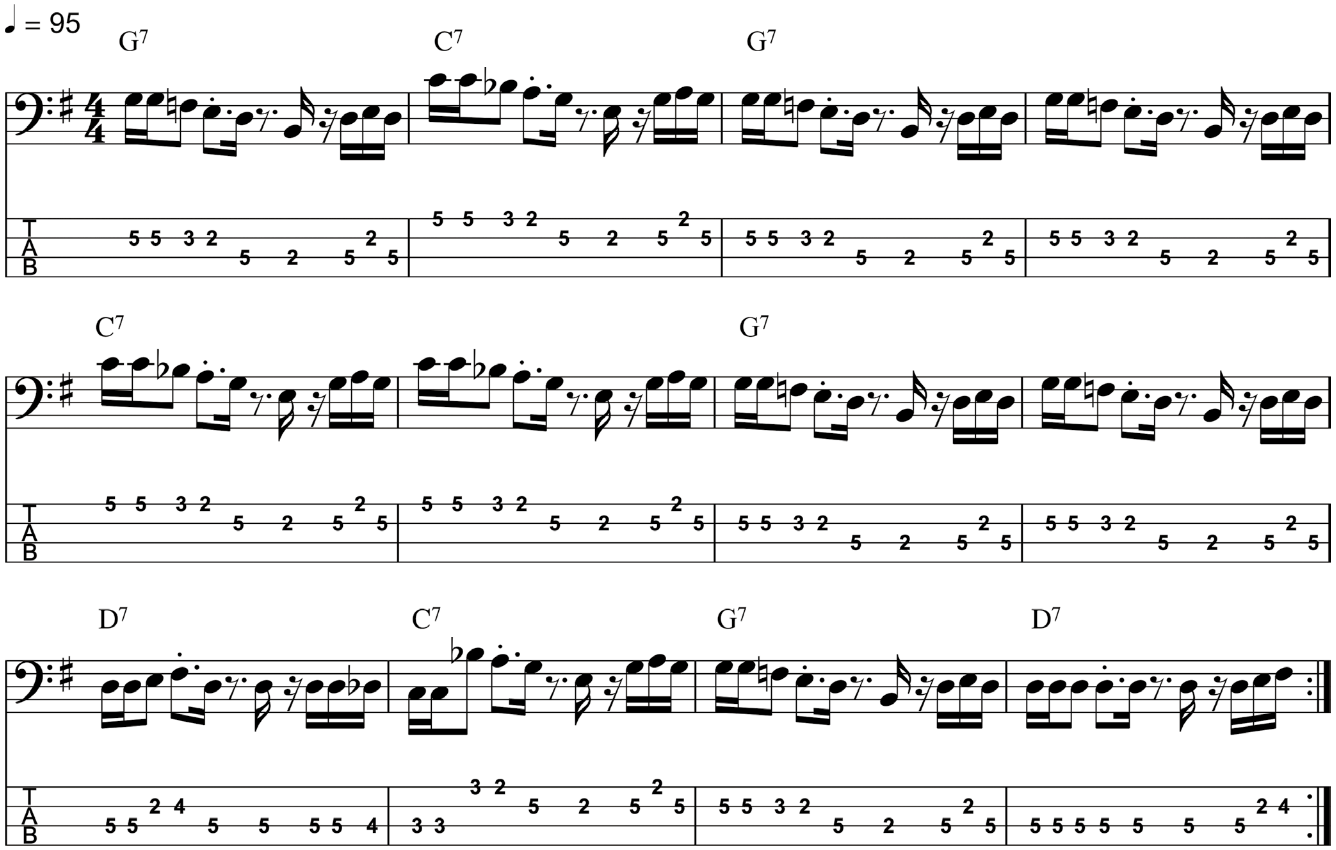
© Roberto Ricciuti/Redferns

EXERCISE ONE



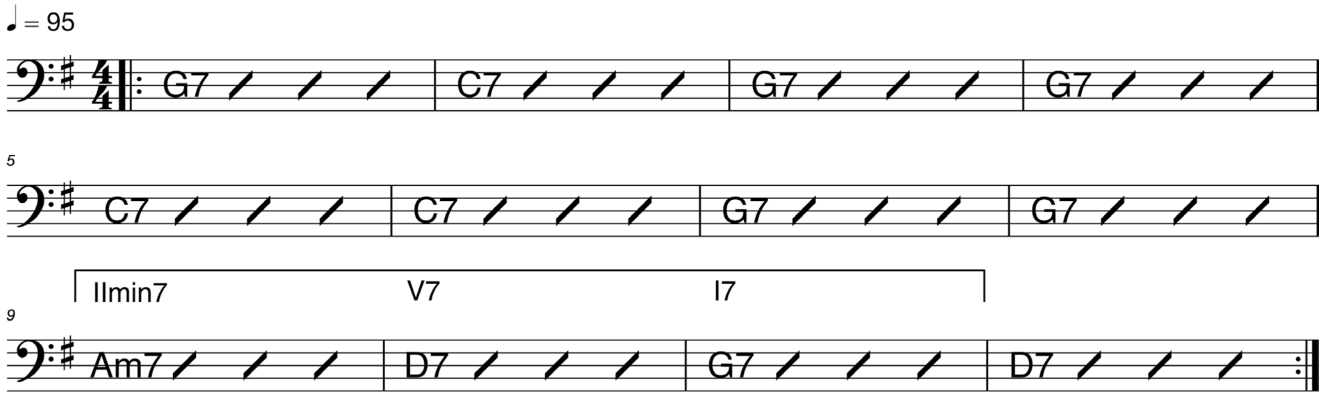
Let's begin with a simple I7-IV7-V7 chord progression, delivered over 12 measures. The 'volta brackets' found above the stave highlight some of the relationships that we've already familiarised ourselves with. In the first two measures they draw focus to the I7-IV7 'quick change' – see also measures four and five – and the V7-IV7 changes are reiterated in measures nine and 10 before we identify the half (or imperfect) cadence at the end of the progression in bars 11 and 12.

EXERCISE TWO



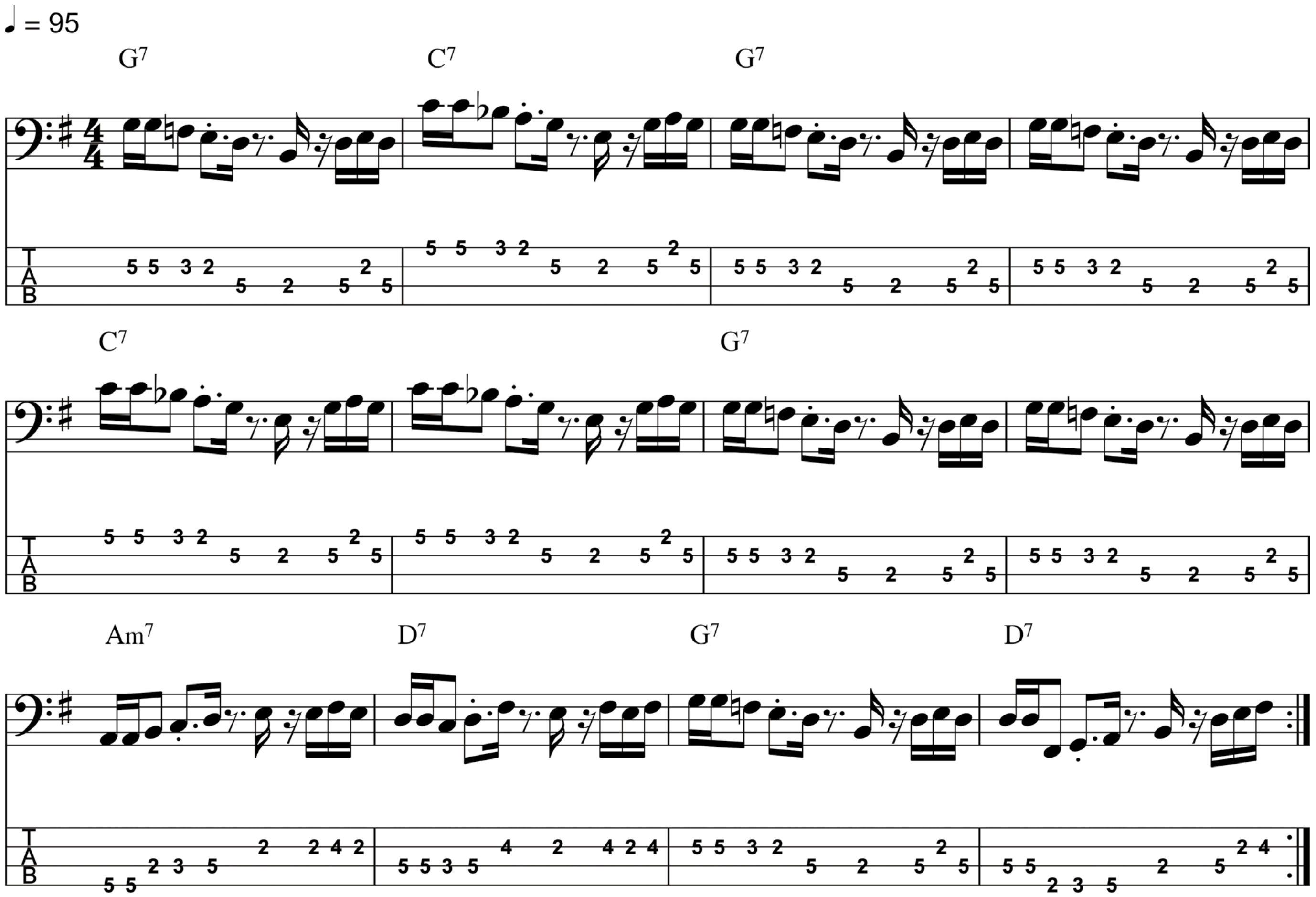
To help us become reacquainted with the last chord progression, Exercise 2 delivers a funky, Mixolydian-inspired motif in the key of G major. Mixolydian is a wonderfully appropriate scale to use with dominant 7th chords, as it perfectly outlines the harmonic requirements of those structures. If you're unfamiliar with the scale, the easiest way to interpret it is as a major scale with a flattened seventh degree. In the later measures you'll be required to play a number of sixteenth-note subdivisions. Although the permutations of four notes of equal value within a single beat are lengthy, for ease, the same rhythm has been used throughout the entire progression.

EXERCISE THREE



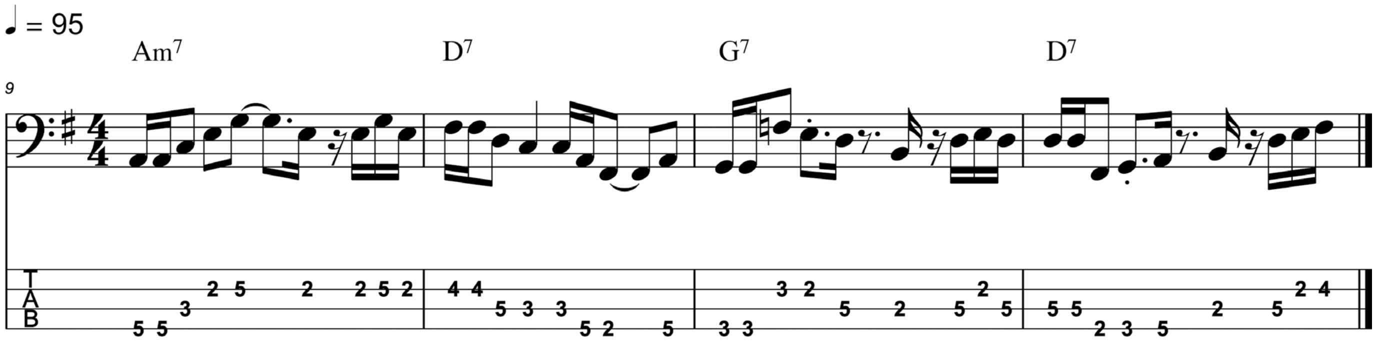
I7-IV7-V7 chord progressions are commonly associated with the harmonic portrayal of the blues. However, if you study them extensively, you'll soon become aware of their use in an array of other styles, ranging from rock, funk and R&B to reggae. Given such an assortment of genres, you'll encounter a number of variations to the rudimentary progression. Casting an eye over the opening measures of Exercise 3, you'll find no real surprises. However, once you arrive at bar nine, you'll discover a modification which identifies this chord progression as a jazz idiom. Bars nine and ten are usually associated with V7-IV7 movements, but in this example these measures have been revised to feature a IImin7-V7. This, plus the ensuing I7 chord, produces a II-V-I progression – a step towards creating a jazz blues.

EXERCISE FOUR



Exercise 4 revisits the melodic portrayal of the chord progression featured in Exercise 2. You'll notice that the IImin7-V7 movement introduced in the last exercise has now become a staple of the ninth and tenth measures. To ease this alteration, the melodic motif employed in its portrayal uses the same rhythmic pattern as all of the other measures. Thankfully, the only additional diatonic information comes in the form of Dorian, a major mode commonly used to interpret IImin7th chords.

EXERCISE FIVE



Exercise 5 now begins an investigation of the diatonic vocabulary associated with IImin7th – V7 chord progressions. Habitually, it's very common to locate the root note of a chord with either the index or middle fingers of your fretting hand. However, by purposely employing alternative fingerings it's possible to unearth a wealth of inspirational melodic and articulation insights. For example, by employing your pinky to locate the root note of the IImin7 chord, it's possible to deliver each interval of the associated minor triad on a different string, which greatly improves your comprehension of the entire structure. This approach has been employed throughout the following measures, which focus on the concluding four bars of the progression.

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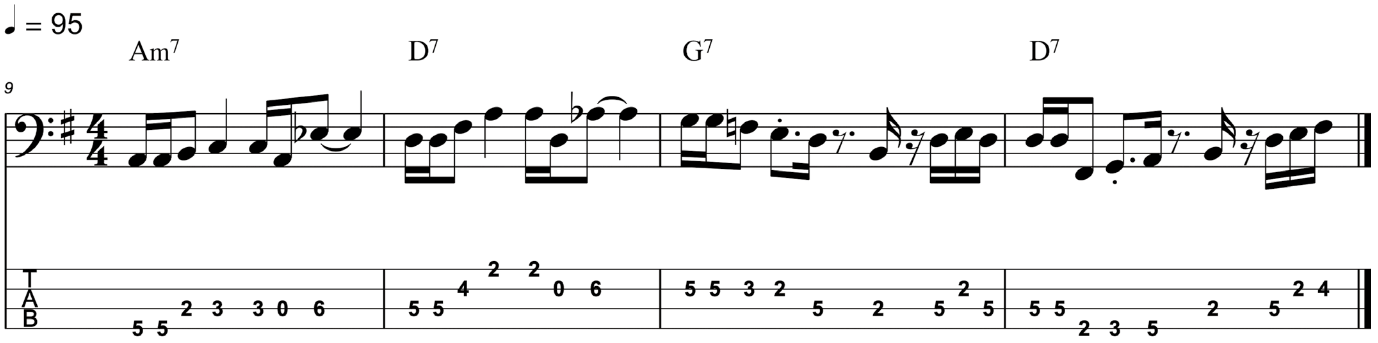
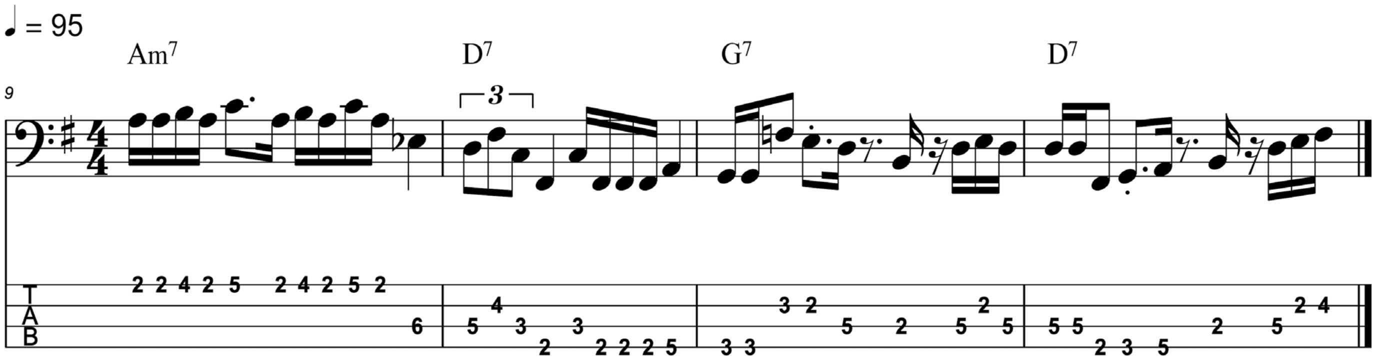
EXERCISE SIX



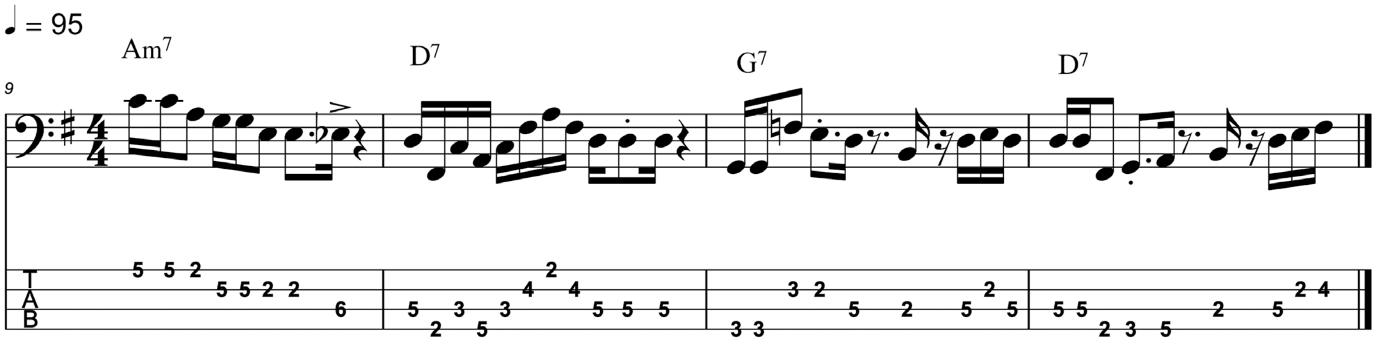
Chromaticism is a wonderful tool and can introduce some unexpected sonic textures. By its very nature, a lot of the desired tones are commonly located slightly out of position. This exercise investigates the application of the ♭5th interval over both the IImin7th and V7 chords. In both examples, try to cover frets two to five with the four fingers of your fretting hand, only moving out of position to deliver the aforementioned chromatic intervals with your pinky. You'll find this movement easily achievable with the help of the open strings indicated in the tablature.

EXERCISE SEVEN



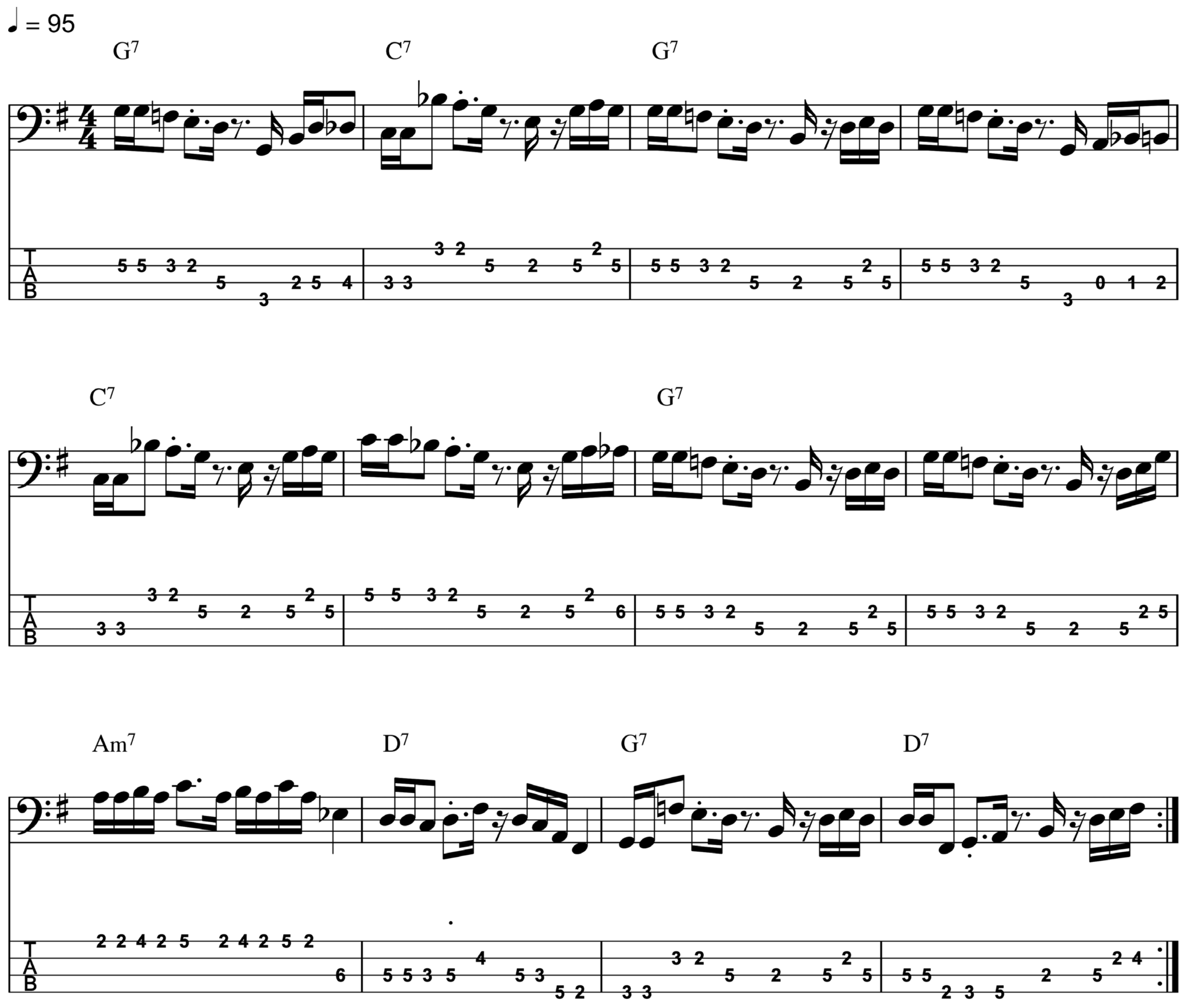
Let's keep looking at our fretting-hand positioning. In this exercise, although the root note of the IImin7th chord has relocated to a higher register, the same approach of traversing your pinky by a semitone to reach the chromatic intervals has been retained from the last exercise. When attempting to interpret V7 chords, there are two essential melodic devices to be aware of: the first is the tritone between the 3rd and 5th intervals and the second is a diminished triad, produced from the collation of the 3rd, 5th and 7th intervals. This structure is a particularly dissonant sound that can be used to great effect.

EXERCISE EIGHT



This month's penultimate exercise is a good example of how fretting-hand positioning is essential to the efficient delivery of a motif. Although the fingering may initially seem a little odd, everything that you encounter over the Amin7th is about positioning your hand for the subsequent measures. When you arrive at the D7 you will be required to deliver a flurry of 16th notes: these have been devised using a fairly accessible diminished triad, as long as your hand is in position. If you can identify where the structure resides on your fretboard, you'll find that the notes will land neatly under your fingertips.

EXERCISE NINE



Exercise 9 is a combination of the miscellaneous melodic devices we've encountered here. Before attempting this final study, take some time to reflect on the disciplines we've celebrated thus far. Remember to keep your fretting hand in one position throughout, traversing only by a semitone when necessary to reach those chromatic intervals. Mastery of this exercise is not measured in the speed of delivery, it's in the efficiency of its portrayal. Until next time, have fun!

If you only practise one thing this month...

Start by scoring out the notes associated with the A Dorian mode and D Mixolydian mode, respectively. Attempt to deliver both scales using the pinky of your fretting hand to access the root note of each structure at fret five of the appropriate string. A Dorian can be produced using the formula **Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone,** and D Mixolydian via **Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone, Tone, Semitone, Tone.** Once you've established the diatonic pitches of both scales, try creating a number of different motifs to help you transcend between the two coinciding structures. As you move from one chord to the next, always be sensitive to the notes that could prove complementary to your direction of travel. Voice leading is the key.

CLASSIC LINES

FROM BACH TO BASS

Rich Brown guides us to Advanced level every month. Read on as he takes us to the very top of bass theory!

I have to say, one major positive that has resulted from spending so much time in lockdown has been the amount of time I've spent studying and practising on the bass. I'm sure many of you have been doing the same.

A couple of conceptual ideas have been my main focus for developing and expanding my vocabulary on the instrument. One has been the study of the bebop language through learning heads and specific solo sections. The other has been the study and transcription of pieces by Bach. Not the Cello Suites. Everyone does the Cello Suites... I especially love the Violin Partitas And Sonatas, and Bach's Works For Lute.

The main goal when it comes to either transcribing a piece or learning a bit of music by ear is to understand the inner workings of the music you take into the shed. Gaining a deeper understanding of all the things that make the piece great to your ear will only stand to get you that much closer to what you want from your musical voice. So take the time to analyse everything, from the phrasing and ornamentation to the harmony and intervallic relationships, that make up the melodic content.

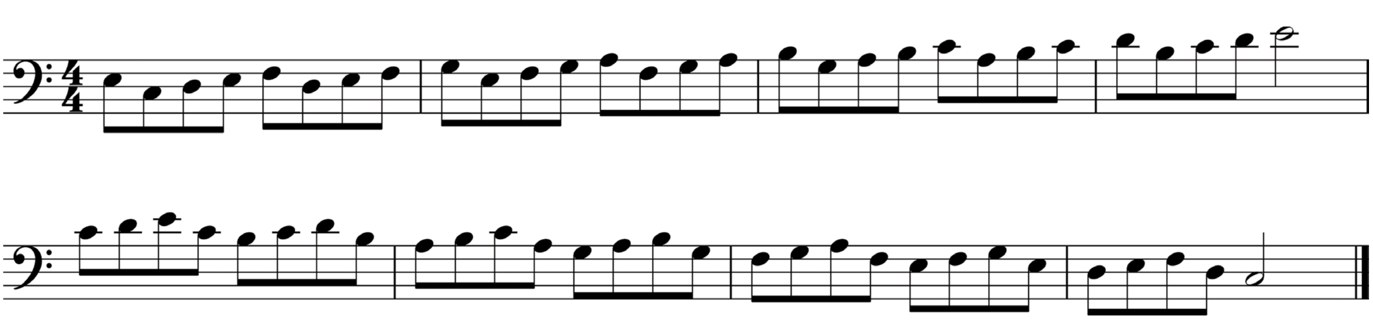
These concepts have been my main area of focus for the last few months. The result has been some of the most productive and eye-opening shed work I've ever done. There's one concept in particular that I want to share with you today. Let's dive in!

We'll start with something we've all seen and likely played before. **Exercise 1** is based

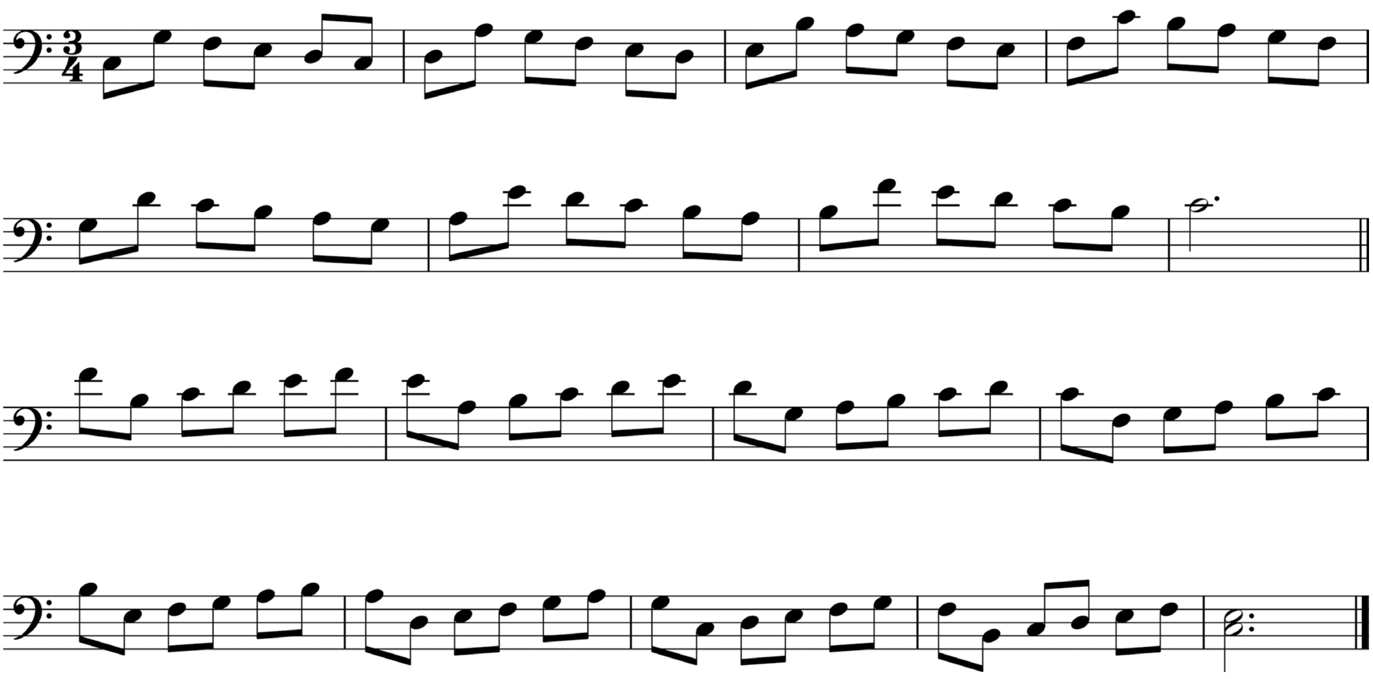
The awe-inspiring Laura Lee of Khruangbin

© Jim Bennett/Getty

EXERCISE ONE



EXERCISE TWO



on a simple 1-2-3-1 pattern in C major. I've always been drawn to these types of scale patterns. They're beautifully melodic despite their simplicity. Bach realised this and used this type of winding and weaving melodicism in much of his work. On further examination, you can begin to recognise patterns in the construction of these beautiful melodies.

When we take a closer look at Exercise 1, we see that this sequence is based on the interval of thirds. It also uses the notes – or note, in this case – between the lowest and highest note of the interval. Here, that interval is the root up to the third.

You may remember the idea of creating simple rules I talked about in a previous lesson. We can come up with some simple rules based on the information above. Using these new rules, we can compose etudes and exercises that are at least somewhat reminiscent of Bach's beautifully spiralling melodies.

Understanding the things that make the piece great to your ear will help you get closer to what you want from your musical voice

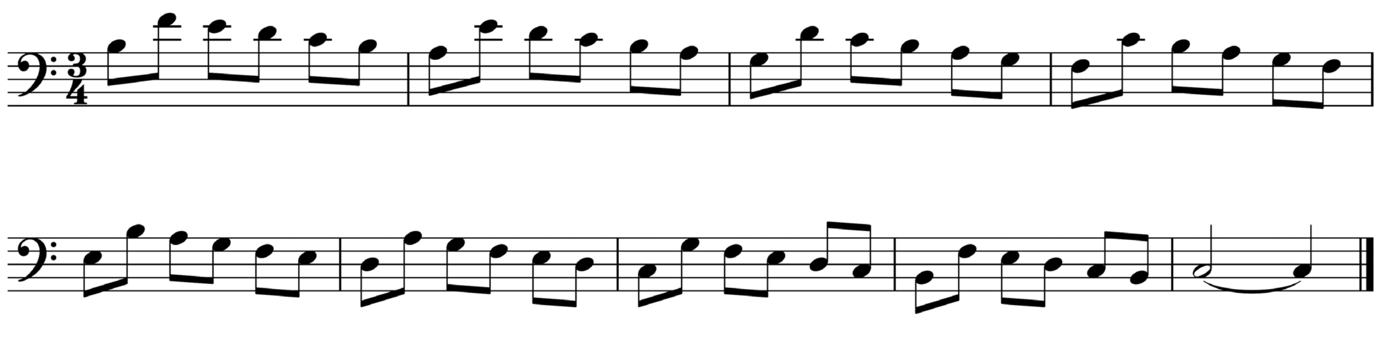
Have a look at **Exercise 2**. This example is based on the interval of a fifth. The sequence played here is 1-5-4-3-2-1. That sequence is then played on each ascending degree of the C major scale. The descending sequence of Exercise 2 is based on a 5-1-2-3-4-5 pattern, and the pattern continues on each descending degree of the C major scale.

Exercise 3 can be played on its own or as an alternative to the last eight bars of

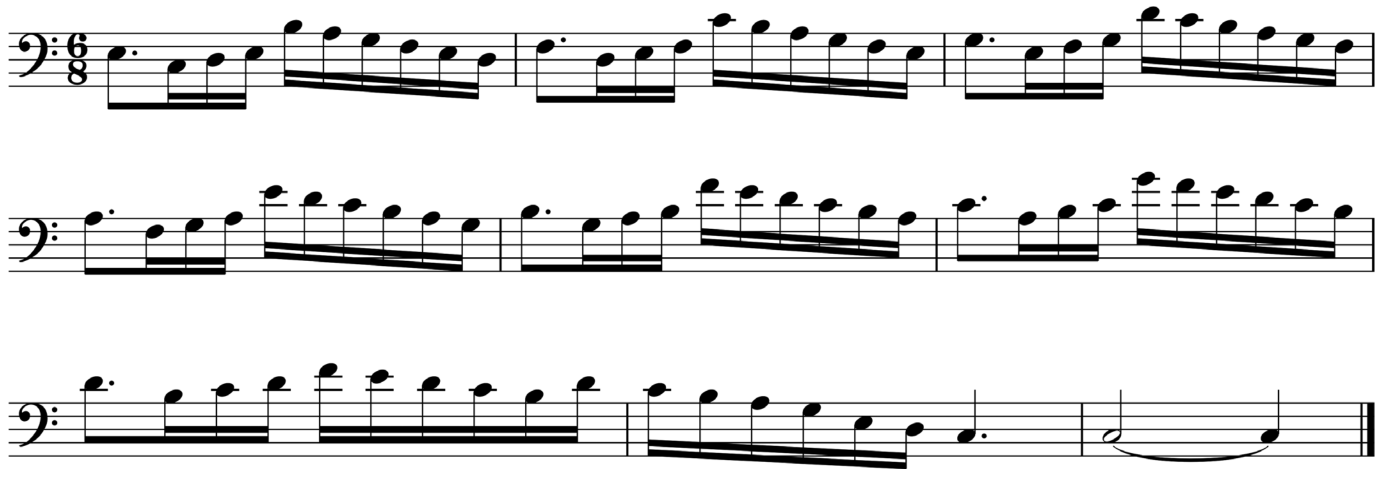
Jamie Law of Vistas picks out some Jazz tones

© Roberto Ricciuti/Redferns

EXERCISE THREE



EXERCISE FOUR



Exercise 2. For this exercise, you're playing the same 1-5-4-3-2-1 sequence starting from the major 7th. From there, you work your way down to the root.

It would be best to play these exercises in the C major position located at the 8th fret of the E string, giving you easy access to the notes in the higher register.

All of these patterns are beautiful, but in addition to their exquisite melodicism, they also challenge the agility and dexterity of your fretting hand, so I would advise that you take them slowly – very slowly. Take as much time as you need to get these patterns under your fingers and into the muscle memory.

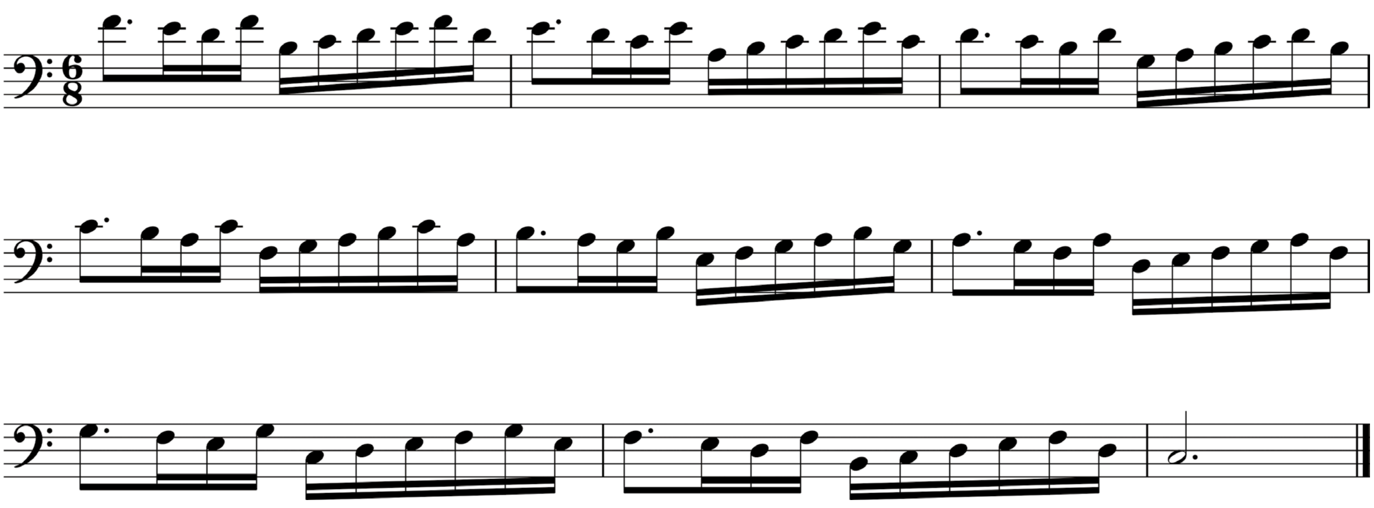
You can start by playing these exercises out of time and without a metronome. The introduction of time and tempo can happen later, as you become more comfortable with the patterns. I would highly recommend this, especially as we get into the following exercises in this lesson. Don't be discouraged or intimidated by the 16th notes here. These exercises are meant to be played *sloooooowly*.

All of these patterns are beautiful, but they challenge the agility and dexterity of your fretting hand, so take them slowly

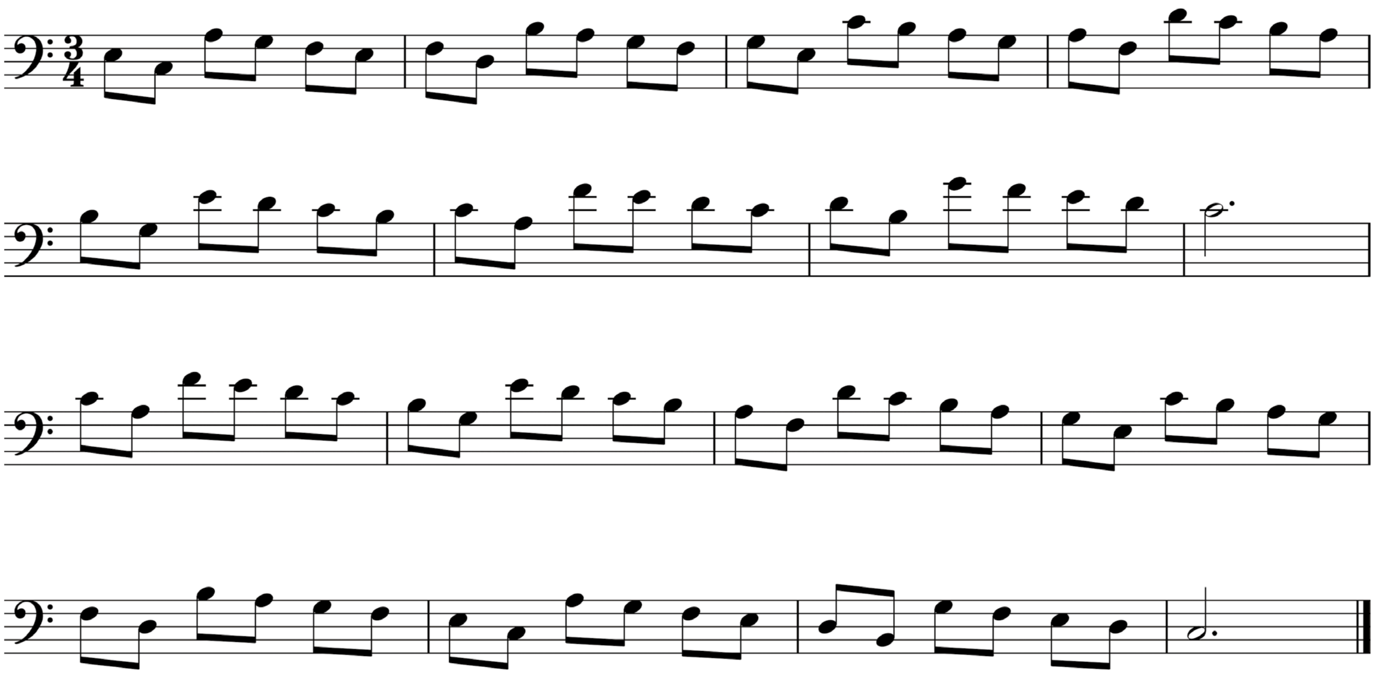
Now that we've established all of that, let's look at **Exercise 4**. What's interesting about this pattern is that we've combined the two intervals from the previous exercises to create a new melodic sequence. The sequence begins with a 3-1-2-3 pattern, based on the interval of a third. We then move up by a fifth to the 7th of the scale and play the scale descending to the 2nd. The entire sequence is 3-1-2-3-7-6-5-4-3-2. This one will be tricky for many of you, but that is only because it is a sequence that is unfamiliar to you. So relax, take a deep breath, dedicate yourself, and think positively.

As it is with any sequential pattern, you'll begin to hear the way the melody moves. You'll start anticipating the right notes based on what you hear in the pattern. Next thing you know, you got this. When it comes to creating these… oh, let's call them 'Compound Sequences', the exercises are constructed using just a few simple variables: **1)** the combination of two (or more) intervals and the scale tones found within those intervals, **2)** whether the intervals and scale tones will be played in an ascending or descending motion, and **3)** whether the descending section of the exercise will play the sequence as is, or in reverse – I suggest you try to learn both.

EXERCISE FIVE



EXERCISE SIX



In the case of Exercise 4, we have a descending third that then ascends back up using the scale tones. That is immediately followed by an ascending fifth that descends back down using the scale tones. **Exercise 5** is simply the reverse of Exercise 4.

With these simple rules, you can develop a plethora of beautiful 'Bach-like' etudes that are bound to keep you busy for a very long time. I've given you a lot to work on today, but I'll leave you with one last exercise using the simple rules.

Exercise 6 is constructed using a descending third that immediately jumps up to the sixth and then descends back down using the scale tones, so the sequence is 3-1-6-5-4-3. It's yet another beautiful melodic pattern to tie your fingers in knots for a while.

You can see how easy it is to put these sequences and exercises together. Try these, and try coming up with your own. They're a great way to build your chops and expand your vocabulary. Make music. Have fun!

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STRAP IT UP

Learn to appreciate your bass strap, advises Dan Veall

The humble bass strap is surely one of the most overlooked items of equipment in our arsenal. Today's column will hopefully help you choose a suitable strap, along with a few pointers to take into consideration when you go shopping.

Wait. You're seriously devoting a whole page to straps?
I am. Understanding the science behind them is absolutely crucial for your health and your playing.

Go on then.
Let's consider the materials first. Most straps are made from leather, suede or woven nylon, but some brands also experiment with modern materials such as breathable neoprene. I've seen straps made from car seat belts, too. Our friend Billy Sheehan uses the woven material used on aircraft carriers to catch airplanes as they land. He attaches them to his basses with stove bolts!

What else do I need to know?
The length of your strap is important. Most straps come in lengths of between 40 and 55 inches, but they can sometimes be longer. Width will play an important part in strap comfort as well: a strap that is too thin will dig into your shoulder and make heavy basses feel even heavier, whereas a wider strap will disperse the load across the shoulder. As I am fairly tall, I can get away with using a strap that is four inches wide, but too wide can also dig in to your neck, so at least three inches is advisable.

This is really boring.
Shut your piehole and listen! Allow me to explain a car seat analogy. When you get in your vehicle, you'll adjust the seat, the steering wheel and the mirrors to suit your optimal driving position. Everything is in easy reach, and there's no overstretching or any need to take your eyes off the road, because you're perfectly comfortable. The same logic applies to bass playing. I set my strap so that the bass stays in exactly the same position when I am sitting down – with good posture, of course – or in a standing position. Why spend hours practising sitting down, only to find that when you stand up the bass is in a completely new position? Of course, if you are the sort of person who values style above substance, then this may not work for you if the bass needs to be down at your ankles...

Are some straps better than others, then?
It depends on your particular requirements. For bassists who need extra comfort, heavily padded straps can be a godsend, although I've tried one or two in the past that seem to stretch while playing. Check reviews of softer straps before you buy, to ensure they will stay put all night. If you're playing long, hot gigs with bare shoulders, then anything scratchy or a material that doesn't breathe, like plastic, may be uncomfortable.

Should I pay a lot of money for a strap?
No, but bear in mind that cheap straps may be poorly manufactured and fail to form a secure hold on the strap buttons of your bass, due to their thin material.

Can a good strap help with my bad back?
Some companies such as D'Addario offer a solution in the shape of a strap shaped like a three-point car harness that distributes weight across both shoulders. I mention it as I have one, and it may be useful for bassists with back ailments.

Can I stop my bass neck-diving with a better strap?
To an extent, yes. A wider strap will obviously make the bass feel a little lighter, but the added width could help stop the strap from sliding as the bass falls forward. Better still, a suede-backed strap will cling to your clothes. However, if you're wearing wedding attire for a function gig, you may find that a heavy bass will keep rucking it up.

Quite. What's a strap lock?
Once you've hung your pride and joy on your strap, everything should in theory stay where it is –unless the strap buttons are of poor design, or your strap has become worn. It's always a good idea to ensure that the strap can't come off the bass, even when force is applied, so brands such as Schaller and Dunlop have effective systems that secure the strap to the bass with a quick-release lock. These still allow the bass to be used with a standard strap, although some systems out there don't – meaning that if you forget your strap, you're screwed!

Dan Veall is a session and stage bass player, educator and gear expert and is here to answer your questions. Contact: @DanVeallBassist

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